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A TRUE STORY

IN THREE PARTS
AND A POSTSCRIPT

by

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To
VIOLET

A TRUE STORY

The material of this novel was contained in four volumes which have appeared separately under different titles, and in effect constituted studies for the present complete work.

The author has here reconstructed and reknit the salient elements in their final form.

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PART I

i

WHAT I like best is when papa takes me to see Mr Max in a hansom not in the perambulator with Sissy walking I don't see why she should walk and hold papa's hand. I can walk as far as she can. Mr Max has got a big black moustache and a watch with music in it and there's another old gentleman sitting in a chair by the window and his legs are covered up and outside the window there's a little fountain with gold fish in it and afterwards we go down some steps and out of a gate and there's grass and I run and boys fly kites and I try to knock Sissy over and she's not allowed to knock me over and she tells papa I do. And Mr Max comes too and there's another littler man with a red cap on his head and he's black and his name is Mustapha and he takes me up like a feather and puts me on his shoulder and runs faster than I can see the trees and the birds. And afterwards there's a pond with boats and I put my toes in the water and papa doesn't see at first because he's lighting a cigarette and then he pulls me away and says I'm naughty but I like it. And there's another place where they all sit outside their doors and inside there's a fire like in the nursery and a smell comes out like before dinner and I pull papa's hand to look inside at the old lady with a cap on and the boy whistling but he can't whistle as well as papa does and he makes a face at me and so do I. And then we go on a long way and there are more steps and there's the hansom again and when papa sees it he holds up his stick and he jumps me up and he lets me pat its tail and he whistles *Old Obadiah* and when we get home Soror opens the door and there's mamma and then Nanny comes and ties the napkin round my neck and there's roast beef and Yorkshire pudding I don't like cut up into those little pieces. And once papa took me to the Zoo and after we got there I

went on the elephant but I liked the bear best because he climbed up the pole and caught the buns but mamma doesn't like where the monkeys are so we only stayed a minute and I cried because I saw one that looked at me and he was just going to say something when papa took me away and the parrots squawk too loud. In the evening Mr Max comes again and Mr and Mrs Brandeis and I like Mr Brandeis best because he doesn't give me up when Nanny comes and goes on playing.

And there's that place call Norwood where mamma and papa go out riding and there's a high wall and a seat I stand on to see them go by and they wave to me and Sissy. Sissy only waves her hanky but I wave my hat and then I throw it on the ground and I can see it from the top of the wall and Nanny can't get it and says I'm naughty and so does Sissy and I'm very glad and we have to go all the way round to fetch it. And I like having milk and my Albert biscuit and going to sleep in the pram and it's all yellow inside when Nanny shuts it up and I can hear her talking to the other nanny and the trees make that funny noise and when I wake up Nanny lets me walk back.

ii

Miss Carroll called all those things that get in the way tassels. There were tassels everywhere. I had to push a lot of them away from the window to look at the tumblers. Sissy sits on the big hassock pretending to read. She doesn't read really. Sissy never does do anything. She can't even play with Minnie though she doesn't mind her smell like I do. Miss Carroll was painting those texts with flowers all over them with a very thin yellow brush. I like Miss Carroll very much. Even Sissy likes her. But I don't like Sissy, I never shall like her, whatever Nanny says. She pinches me when Miss Carroll isn't looking and she tells stories and says I'm naughty when I've done nothing. I told Nanny I wished she'd die but Nanny said I was wicked so I wish she'd go away instead altogether, so that I could be with mamma and Miss

Carroll without her. And she's worse since we've got on these black clothes after yesterday. We all went in the carriage to a place where I had never been before. There were trees in front and a path and when we got inside it was dark and there were nothing but tassels everywhere. And mamma and papa went away behind them and took Sissy and left me and I heard somebody grown up crying. I was frightened but Cousin Mary came and gave me a black-currant lozenge. Then mamma came in with papa and he said undo her stays and Cousin Mary gave her a bottle to smell with a silver top on it and a red thing Miss Carroll says is coral in the middle of it. I heard mamma say my poor mother, my poor mother and I wanted to get on mamma's knee and kiss her but papa wouldn't let me, so I got down and pulled Sissy's hair and she screamed loud on purpose. I didn't pull it much but papa was very angry.

I like being in this little room downstairs because of the tumblers and the old man with a lot of hats on his head. I wish he'd come now the tumblers have finished, they've rolled up their carpet and their little boy is looking at me. I said Miss Carroll do give me some pennies for him, please let me. And on Sundays the muffin-man comes and rings his bell but I hate learning the collects. They're worse than the psalms because they're longer and I don't know what they mean. Not like " The Lord is my Shepherd, therefore will I fear nothing. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil ; Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me." I think that's right. And I remember the next one. " Blessed is the man who hath not sat in the seats of the ungodly nor stood in the way of sinners," but I can't remember anything after that.

I like walking in Kensington Gardens because of the leaves. They come half-way up my legs and I walk through them and push them about to make them rustle. And there's that funny round place where we sit, where the old man comes with the medals on and Miss Carroll talks to him about Sebastopol and the charge of the Light Brigade and that fat old woman who always gives me caraway comfits. I like caraway comfits but the seeds stick in my tooth and it

hurts. And I like the smell of something burning and the smoke going through the trees and getting lost in the other sort of smoke all over the Round Pond. And coming home to tea in the nursery and when Nanny pulls the fender so that I can make toast and she puts the butter on quick and it melts. And the musical box Uncle Fred sent me, it plays six tunes but I like playing *Fra Diavolo* twice. Sissy doesn't know which is which but papa says I've got a very good ear. I wonder when I shall see Uncle Fred. I can't see what he's like properly in that picture in papa's room and papa had my photograph taken in my sailor suit on purpose to send him but he said Mr Ossani's going to do a proper picture some day, a big one, like the one of Uncle Leopold in the drawing-room.

Most of all I like Nanny to sing about Lord Lovel and how the roses grew and grew. I know nearly all of it and the tune as well.

Lord Lovel he stood at his castle gate
A-stroking his milk-white steed,
When up comes Lady Nancy Bell
A-wishing her lover godspeed, speed, speed,
A-wishing her lover godspeed.

Then it goes on a lot until poor Lord Lovel got dead and Lady Nancy died of a broken heart and

Out of her grave there grew a red rose
And out of his grave a briar
And twined themselves into a true lover's knot
For all true loveyers to admire—mire—mire
For all true loveyers to admire.

And I've got a book called *Reinecke Fuchs* with lovely pictures—papa reads me that sometimes but I don't understand much because it's in German only parts like about Grimbard the Brock. Uncle Leopold sent it to me and I like it better than the other book of *The House that Jack built.* Sissy likes that best. Sissy can't say any German and she can't sing Lord Lovel either. She can't do anything though she's much older than I am.

But the best book of all is *Prince Hempseed* because he's just like I am going to be. I don't want to be any of the others but I do want to be Prince Hempseed even if they drive me away into the woods but Sissy isn't like his sister. I hope I shall have another sister by then. Miss Carroll says I very likely shall.

On Sunday morning mamma goes in a bath-chair and papa and Nanny and me. Sissy goes to church with Miss Carroll but I'm too little. And Mr Brandeis comes too sometimes and they take off their hats to a lot of ladies and gentlemen and they ask me what my name is. All my best toys are in the ottoman. Nanny gets them out on Sunday afternoons and I play with them while she reads *The Quiver*. The one I like best is Blondin riding a velocipede on the tight-rope. But I love the bricks, the plain kind. I can make a house to live in when I'm Prince Hempseed with a high wall round so that Sissy can't come inside.

iii

Uncle Leopold must be very, very old because he's papa's uncle as well as mine. He had his breakfast when we'd finished ours and after papa drove off to the station. He had the spare room on the ground-floor looking on to where the high trees were with the rooks in them and the round seat underneath. When I came in he always held his arms out wide and I ran in between them. Then he put his arms round me and made me stand between his legs and answer his questions. I didn't mind because I loved Uncle Leopold but I couldn't understand very much. He wore a round black cap and he had little bags under his eyes. His face all screwed up when he laughed and you couldn't see his eyes at all. His face was a funny yellow and covered all over with wrinkles. When I kissed him, I felt the short bristles with my lips ; his skin was so nice and cool and so were his hands. He wasn't at all big and he was all bent up but you couldn't tell, when he was sitting at the table. He always had a glass of water and two lumps of sugar in a saucer and Johann, his

servant, stood behind his chair. He said "*Da*" and pointed at the glass and I dropped the two lumps of sugar into the water. Then he stirred it and drank a little with the spoon in the glass and put his two fingers on his waistcoat just below where the buttons were undone at the top and said "Ah!" right down in his chest. Then I said "*Gut?*" and he nodded his head up and down and said "*Gut.*"

After Johann gave him his coffee, he rolled up a cigarette and let me strike a match but he made me hold it to a thick round yellow string in the box and blow, and he lit his cigarette from it. We did that every morning.

There was a black leather pocket-book with an elastic band round it on the table, and every morning he put his glasses on his nose and took off the band and took out a sheet of paper with a lot of names on it. While he smoked, he put his middle finger, the one that was so brown, on the paper and followed the names down with it till about half-way and his white cuff with a large round gold stud in it came down over his knuckles. Once I asked him what the paper was about and he said "*Geburtstage. Heute muss ich deine Tante Julia schreiben.*" When he said "*Aufwiedersehen* Richard," I knew it was time to go and at the door I waved my hand to him because I knew he was watching me through the little bags where his eyes were. When I turned round I could see his white socks and slippers under the table but he wore high boots under his trousers when he went out, nearly up to his knees.

Johann had been a cavalry soldier and he gave me my first riding lessons. He walked beside my pony, pressing my knee to the saddle and my toes inward. We went down the gravel path to the Observatory and round it, then back the other way to the seat under the high trees where Uncle Leopold sat with mamma and she held her sunshade over him.

Afterwards Johann took the pony to the stable and mamma went in. Uncle Leopold held my hand and we walked very slowly to the summer-house where the Memorial was. Out of doors, he wore a straw hat with a wide brim and a very narrow black ribbon and he took it off when we got to the summer-house. I knew the Memorial was to grandpapa

but I couldn't read the inscription because it was in German. Uncle Leopold read it out loud and made me repeat some of the words. He went to the Memorial every day and sometimes Johann pushed him in his wheel-chair.

Every evening when I and Sissy came down after tea, Uncle Leopold danced me on his foot but papa used to stop him doing it and danced me himself because he said it tired Uncle Leopold. But I didn't like the way papa did it so much. Uncle Fred danced me best of all. They all sang the same words and I know them by heart and the tune too.

Ueb immer treu und Redlichkeit
Bis an dein kühles Grab
Und weiche keinen Finger breit
Von Gottes Wegen ab
Tralalala lalala lalala lalala
Lalala lalala la.

Sissy never liked being danced and she never learnt the words but perhaps when baby gets older she will, like me. It was her first birthday the other day and while I was standing by mamma's bed saying good-morning, papa brought in a little box with cotton-wool in it and a pearl in the middle because baby had got two teeth and he said some day when they come out he's going to have them made into a pin to wear in his tie.

iv

Mr Milosovitch nearly always came down to Craythorne on Sundays. He arrived in the morning before luncheon and stayed to dinner. The T-cart and " Bobby " always met the eleven-thirty train from Paddington that the Sunday guests came by. Sometimes papa used to drive in to Cray station and sometimes Mussell. When not more than two were expected, I was allowed to go, if we got back from church in time. That depended upon old Mr Hicks who changed the morning service from ten to eleven as he felt inclined. Nanny said he did it to suit Lord Adleham whose family pew was

opposite ours but had a door in it and was shut up so you couldn't see inside. He had two daughters. One of them looked like the Sleeping Beauty in my story book, and I often talked about her to Nanny after she had finished her sherry and almonds and raisins on Sundays. When we got back from church early, the first thing I did was to ask Mussell if papa was going to the station, hoping he wasn't. Mussell let me drive but papa didn't. I thought it was because he liked flicking " Bobby " with the whip just behind the collar and making him jump out of his trot. I wanted to do that myself and I sat there watching him flick and pull at the old grey's mouth knowing I could do it just as well as he could. When we got to the station even papa allowed me to hold the reins while he went to meet the train. I liked sitting by myself as if the T-cart and " Bobby " belonged to me and having his nice hot smell mixed up with the smell of the leather, all to myself. Generally Mr Benda and Uncle Fred came out first. I loved Mr Benda. He had shiny boots and a thick way of talking and he was always in a good temper. Papa came after them with Mr Milosovitch who always wore a grey topper and frock-coat and sat on the front seat. When Uncle Fred came down by the same train, he and Mr Benda followed in the fly. Mamma waited for us on the rose-path leading to the drive and Mr Milosovitch took off his hat and his oily black hair shone in the sun. He got down very carefully and kissed her hand, then he held both her hands out in front of her. He wore yellow gloves with black stripes on the backs. Afterwards he pulled his pocket-handkerchief out of the back pocket of his frock-coat ; even in the open air I could smell the sickly scent on it. He dusted his boots and trousers with it and offered mamma his arm and they walked on together talking, every now and then stopping to smell the roses.

It was a long time before I got Mr Milosovitch's name exactly right, but his face always stuck in my head. Papa was fearfully exact about it. I dreaded his " Richard, say how d'you do. What's the gentleman's name ? " There were people whose faces I simply couldn't remember, but I remembered Mr Milosovitch's because of his beaky nose, his

black whiskers and hair curling round his ears and his black-rimmed eyeglass at the end of a black ribbon. He always sat next to mamma at meals, I was on the other side of her. He had small fat white hands and wore a lot of rings, one on his left little finger had a blue stone in it. I once asked Uncle Fred what it was called and he said " Pish ! God knows ! " Mr Milosovitch talked in some language I couldn't understand, French probably. Now and then he leant forward and asked me something in English. I never knew what he meant, so he turned back to mamma and said something I knew was about me by the way he looked at me while he stroked his whiskers. When the sweet came, I kept my eye on his plate because he took such large helpings and he always liked the kind I liked.

Uncle Fred made faces at me whenever Mr Milosovitch said anything and when we were safe in a corner of the billiard-room after lunch, which was my dinner, he used to poke me in the side and say " Well, Dickerl, how's your friend Milosovitch ? "

Little by little I found out that when Uncle Fred came down he pretended not to see Mr Milosovitch at Paddington and got into another carriage. When the coffee came in, all the gentlemen except Mr Milosovitch pulled out silver boxes in which were tobacco and papers and rolled cigarettes but Mr Milosovitch didn't. He had a big leather case with a crown on it and when he opened it, there was nothing inside so papa gave him one of his own cigars. He always did this on Sundays, so I got into the way of watching for it. Uncle Fred got to know I watched and winked at me and made me laugh. I had to hide my face so that mamma wouldn't notice.

Really I didn't bother much about Mr Milosovitch one way or the other and perhaps I should have forgotten him if it hadn't been for a certain thing happening.

As a rule on Sunday afternoons I had to go for a walk with Fräulein Schwind. How I hated those walks and how I loathed Fräulein Schwind. There the old beast was outside the long window in the billiard-room walking up and down waiting for me and I had to leave the billiard-room full of

lovely blue smoke and Uncle Fred and his jokes, put down the long cue-rest I held in case anyone wanted it and go off and be jawed at in German.

One Sunday I don't know what happened, perhaps Fräulein Schwind was ill. Anyhow I didn't go for a walk and I wasn't wanted in the billiard-room. Papa had a lot of friends that day and they were playing a game with ninepins in the middle and they kept on putting money on the edge of the table. Papa told me to go and find mamma. Uncle Fred saw that I wasn't pleased and took hold of my hand and walked me across the courtyard, telling me that he would make up for it by reading the Rindelgrover story out loud before I went to bed. Rindelgrover was a dwarf with a short trusty sword and rode on a pig.

The drawing-room was on the other side of the house and one could get into it out of the garden by the side door. As we went into the room, mamma was sitting on a chair with her back towards the door but Mr Milosovitch was kneeling down in front of her. When we got inside, Uncle Fred suddenly stood still but I went on to mamma though I was looking at Mr Milosovitch. What *was* he doing? Then he jumped up stiff and buttoned his coat up tight across his stomach. He stood up very straight and held out his hands to me; I could see the blue stone on his little fat finger. But I kept away from him close to mamma and she held me to her. No one said anything and presently Uncle Fred went away.

When I went upstairs to tea, I couldn't help wondering what Mr Milosovitch was doing but I didn't say anything to Nanny.

Uncle Fred didn't read me the Rindelgrover story after all so I made up my mind to ask him about Mr Milosovitch who, for a wonder, wasn't in the room. I was sitting on the arm of his chair in the corner and I whispered "I say, Uncle Fred, do tell me what Mr Milosovitch was kneeling for?" Uncle Fred looked at papa and mamma who were talking to Mr Benda and two of the other gentlemen. He put his hand on the other side of my head and seemed to spit into

my ear. " Sh ! Sh ! you're to say nothing. He was taken very ill and had to go away."

Some time after that papa told me that I should never see poor Mr Milosovitch again ; he had suddenly died. Uncle Fred was there and considering he winked at me I thought I might just ask him one question. " Was it anything to do with his kneeling down ? "

Uncle Fred looked at papa but he didn't say anything and just then mamma came into the room with a beautiful yellow dress on.

v

On my seventh birthday Uncle Fred came down to Craythorne on purpose. I can't remember exactly but I think he always had been there on my birthdays. Papa said though it was on Thursday this time and account-day, Uncle Fred was coming all the same but they would probably be late. I had been waiting for him ever since six but it was past seven when they got home. Mamma had arranged all my presents on the whatnot table in the little room half-way up the stairs where the floor always creaked on the landing. We called it the green-room. The curtains and sofas and chairs were green but it was all shiny black wood inside and smelt of Minnie because her basket was there. I didn't much like her really but I pretended to because of mamma, and Alexander said I must be kind to her, she was so faithful. I think partly Alexander liked her because her eyes were red round the edges like his as though they had both been crying. I'd hardly touched the presents because I wanted Uncle Fred to show them to me properly. Papa showed me the top you put different pieces of wire into so that when it spun round it made figures doing all sorts of antics. But he was in such a hurry to go to the city he could only show me three out of the whole box. I knew Uncle Fred would like spinning it so that it would go off with a noise like the wind makes. I waited in the hall for the sound of the wheels but I didn't hear them because it was snowing and it was only when Alexander ran through to open the door that I knew they'd come. Uncle

Fred shook a lot of snow off his coat on the mat and lifted me on to his shoulder and said "*Glücklicher Geburtstag, Spitzbub !*" I asked him to come and look at the presents but he said he was tired and sat down in the big leather chair in the library and pulled me on to his knee. I twisted the curly hair behind his ears but I couldn't keep him awake. Minnie came in and I got down and pinched her tail and she snapped at me. That woke him up and he said " Dick, get a paper parcel out of my coat pocket." When he'd undone it, there was a silver money-box shaped like a beehive. He put his finger-nail under one of the bees, the top opened and out fell a lot of coins. He shut the hive up and made me drop the coins through the slit at the top and count them, there were ten altogether. " Ten thaler from grandpapa in that silver beehive all the way from Austria for Dick. The bees work hard all day getting honey, Dick must be industrious like a bee." Then he put his fingers in the top pocket of his waistcoat and took out a gold piece. " Drop that in too " he said " and now let's go and look at the presents." He spun the top a lot of times and put nearly all the wires in but I wanted him to come on and read one of the new books called *The North Pole* before papa and mamma came down. It was all about Captain Hatteras and Cyrus Field and Gideon Spillett and about their ship which stuck in the ice, a brig with a very strong, square-built hull.

On my birthday I was allowed to sit up at the table and have some dessert. There was champagne with little bits of ice floating about chinking against the side and papa held up his glass and said " *Hoch, hoch, die Eltern* " and mamma and Uncle Fred touched his glass with theirs. Then Uncle Fred winked at me and said " *Prosit Spitzbub* " and papa told Alexander to put a little in my glass so that I could drink some too.

Nanny put the silver beehive on the mantelpiece opposite my bed. The firelight made it look like a red ball and I fell asleep and dreamed of being roasted like Cyrus Field, the engineer, talked about in the book.

The next morning while Alexander was doing the silver I told him about the brig and he said he would make me one.

He had been a sailor and he told me about his ships and voyages. It took a long time but at last she was finished. She had three masts and two jibs and spars and square-sails and a mainsail and a helm. She was painted brown and was sticky and smelt of tar and turpentine. I thought her perfect but Alexander said she wasn't and he would make a much better one. We took her down to the pond which was very long but not so very broad and had willows all round. There was a spring in the middle and it was awfully deep, ever so far over papa's head and there was thick mud at the bottom so if you sank, you got stuck and you never came up again. It was dreadfully dangerous. At the ends the banks were very steep and there were a lot of rushes and frogs and when you got down by the water, no one could see you. That's how I dodged Fräulein Schwind. But the worst of it was that the brig wouldn't stay straight. Alexander said she needed a keel and he would see what he could do. Fräulein Schwind always tried to prevent my being with Alexander but we got away behind the round-house where the engines were and she never found out we were at the pond. But the brig never would stand up and Alexander said we wanted a good piece of lead only that would cost some money and he wouldn't have any before February. I stayed awake that night thinking about the brig because the end of the pond was all frozen exactly like the North Pole and if only we could get the brig stuck fast in the ice properly, we could build the hut and make a fire and explore.

As soon as everything was quiet, I got out of bed. I put a chair in front of the fender and stepped on it with one foot. I could just reach the money-box. I tried and tried but it wouldn't come undone till I banged it against the leg of the bed and it flew open. All the money rolled about on the floor and made such a noise I thought it would wake Nanny up. So I got into bed and pretended to be asleep but nobody came and I got out again and put all the money back except the gold piece Uncle Fred had put inside and the hive shut up almost like before except for being a little on one side. At breakfast papa said Minnie had woke him up by growling in the middle of the night.

I didn't see Alexander all the morning because Fräulein Schwind never let me out of her sight but just after dinner I saw him come out of mamma's boudoir. When mamma took me into the green-room and asked me if I had heard anything in the night, I said I hadn't but I was very frightened and she said nothing else.

I didn't see Alexander all day though I looked everywhere for him. I wanted to give him the gold piece and I was so afraid that beast Fräulein Schwind would notice my keeping my hand on it in the pocket of my knickers.

When papa came home, he always went to see mamma first. Afterwards he asked Fräulein Schwind whether I'd been good or not. This time, though she said "*Ziemlich artig*" he didn't look pleased but took me into the library and stood me up opposite him in the big leather arm-chair. "Richard, did you do anything to that money-box grandpapa sent you?" I said I hadn't and when he asked me the same question over again, I went on saying I hadn't.

Then he sent for Nanny to take me to bed and I went to that place and dropped the gold coin into it.

I never saw Alexander again but I saw Johnny Everest,the head gardener's little boy on the bank of the pond pulling something along by a string. When he saw me, he ran away and I believe it was the brig.

vi

My first term at St. Vincent's was the summer one. It was simply awful being driven over by Mussell in the T-cart. Old Bobby jog-trotted, plop, plop, down the curly drive between nasty thick laurels and an iron railing. On the other side there was a field where a lot of boys were playing cricket but I didn't know it was cricket till Mussell told me. Lucas took my box and told me to go into the little room with a lot of photographs of boys on the wall while he went on talking to Mussell and patting Bobby. I didn't even see them drive away because while I was standing at the window, Mr Beasley

came in. He was so enormous I could hardly see his face and he had a long red beard ending in a point in the middle of his chest and he put the tips of it into his mouth while he asked me questions I couldn't answer. His trousers were short and he wore low shoes that were nearly as long as his beard and had very thick soles. He pulled the bell and told Lucas to take me into the playing field.

A boy was standing close by and I went up to him and asked him what his name was. He said " What's yours ? " Afterwards he told me his name was Ramsey and I asked him to be my friend. He laughed and stood still for a while looking at the boys playing. Then he walked across to another place and I walked with him and tried to take hold of his hand but he pulled it away. I didn't know then we were part of the game and were fielding and he called me a little fool. I told him I thought he was going to be my best friend but now I knew he was my bitterest enemy.

After the beginning of the term they put hurdles across part of the field where it went into a square between high hedges and one Saturday afternoon the boys helped to make hay. It was very hot and Lucas unlocked the cupboard where he kept the boys' hampers and we all bought bottles of lemonade. Paddy Houston and I made a regular little hut, like Livingstone, out of the haycocks and after we had drunk our bottles of lemonade we lay down in the lovely smelling hay and I told him about when papa and mamma and I and Soror went to Bonn, only I said pater because the first day Lopez kicked me for saying papa. Paddy didn't believe about Soror being black, he said nobody ever saw a black footman and he didn't believe about the storks in the marshes at Bonn nor about the soldiers marching back from France with green wreaths on the tops of their rifles. And when Paddy told Lopez afterwards, he didn't believe me either and twisted my wrist. I was lying on my back and I could just see the sky through a little hole at the top of the hut. Every now and then a big bird flew across and then a little white cloud. I was half in a dream but Paddy began talking to a man outside who had very thick reddish curly hair and a brown belt with a brass buckle that shone like anything. The

sweat was pouring down his face and he was rubbing it with a huge red pocket-handkerchief. Then he spat on his hands and rubbed them on the handle of his rake and went away. I asked Paddy why he spat and he told me all labourers did that and that they had bugs in their hair. He said if I watched this man I should see him scratch his head. So I got up and watched him and in a little while he stopped raking and scratched his head. When he did that, I went up to him and asked him if it was true he had bugs in his hair because I wanted to know what they were like. But he got very angry and was going to hit me with the rake so I ran away as fast as I could. When I told Paddy about it, he roared with laughter and said I was the biggest idiot he had ever seen.

We had tea at long tables, the smallest boys sat at the end near the masters. I was next to Mr Atwood. He was very strong and had beautiful blue eyes and I liked him very much. I was just going to ask him what bugs were when Mr Beasley came behind my chair so that his beard touched my face and whispered in my ear I was to come to his study the next morning after breakfast. Mr Atwood looked at me in a funny way but he didn't say anything nor did Baby Marr who sat next to me and must have heard. But all of a sudden I remembered that Paddy had told me Mr Beasley always said that to a boy when he was going to give him a swishing. I was just drinking some tea and I nearly choked. Mr Atwood looked at me so I pretended to eat but I felt sick and he patted me on the shoulder.

I didn't say anything to Paddy but when we went to bed I tried to remember what I ought not to have done and I kept on waking and pulling the sheet up because I was shivering.

I don't know how I got dressed and I wanted prayers to last for ever and breakfast too, but they were over quicker than usual and I went and knocked on the door of the study. It was brown inside and there was an awful stuffy smell. Mr Beasley went to the corner of the room and took something in his hand. I was too frightened to see what it was. Mr Beasley said I ought to be ashamed to insult a poor labouring man and he told me to take down my knickers and pointed

to a chair and said I was to kneel down at it. He gave me four swishes. It made an awful noise in the air and when it hit but it didn't hurt very much and I didn't cry. I said I was very sorry but, really, I was awfully glad because it was all over.

I found Paddy in the playground and told him all about it and as he wanted to see, I took him into the lavatory and showed him my stripes. But I made him promise to tell me what bugs were.

vii

At first I hardly knew anything about the boys but I got to know their names at call-over. One day when Bruce kicked Baby Marr and told him he was a nice kind of an earl I asked him what Bruce meant and he said one couldn't help being an earl any more than Bruce could being an honourable. He said other boys in the school were lords besides him and Wentworth was going to be a duke but they never kicked him because he was strong. I asked him why Lopez said I was the son of a low-born blackguard but he didn't know any more than I did.

I didn't mind being at St. Vincent's except when Mackenzie twisted my arm in the lavatory and Cramp hacked me behind just as I was going into class so that it hurt all the morning. I wasn't very frightened of Mr Beasley, less than I was of papa and I liked the cricket matches, especially the masters' ones and Sunday evenings when Mr Beasley read *Ungava* aloud and we lay about on the floor and ate toffee.

The night before I got my first swishing about the bugs I thought a great deal about God before I got to sleep. I often do when I go to bed but especially when I'm miserable. Miss Carroll told me about Him and about His awful majesty and how the earth trembles at His frown, but Nanny always talked more about Jesus. She made me kneel down and say

Gentle Jesus meek and mild
Listen to a little child

every night and sometimes it was awfully cold. I think that was one reason I began thinking of God when I went to bed and got warm. What I thought about God was always that I had done something wrong and that He was punishing me but I didn't mind it ; it was like pretending to be frightened. Then I got into a sort of dream about God and Mr Beasley and papa and Fräulein Schwind all mixed up and they all punished me but the only one I didn't mind being punished by was God. In the dream God looks something like papa but more like Mr Beasley, only much bigger and stronger. He's got a beard too and he sits on high so that I don't hardly reach up to his knees when he makes me kneel on the footstool.

I got rather good at squash that first term. There was a boy called Sully who was best and he began showing me. He had large glassy eyes that stuck out. One of the masters called Mr Huliet liked him very much and was always teasing and tickling him. Sully was awfully ticklish and used to lie on the ground and scream with laughter till the tears ran down. Once he tried to tickle me like Mr Huliet did him, but Mr Atwood saw him and stopped him and told him he wasn't to do it again. I wonder what Mr Atwood would have said to Mr Huliet.

Some of the boys like Ellerby and Hames talked a lot about hunting and shooting. I didn't know what hunting was or what they shot and they said I was a beastly little fool when I asked them questions. Ellerby said he'd like to be a huntsman and that all the country about St. Vincent's was rotten and when I said it was awfully nice at Craythorne, he said it was worse because it was nearer London and nothing but dirty brickfields and market gardens. He asked me if we'd got any horses and I told him about the pair and Bobby and mamma's mare Janet and my pony Tommy. But he said he didn't count them, they weren't hunters. Then he asked me about my pater and when I told him he went to the city every day, he said of course he didn't hunt, he was a cad, only cads had offices. As he said all that in front of Marr and Paddy and Mus I was ashamed and went away. So when I got to bed that evening, I began thinking about what I could tell them that would make them think papa wasn't a cad but

a very wonderful man. I thought and thought. The next day I told them a long story, all about a ship papa had got that could go under the sea like the *Nautilus* in Jules Verne, and brought back pearls and diamonds and rubies and sapphires and how he had so many you couldn't count them, millions and millions. And how he'd got an island in the Pacific Ocean where there was coral and pine-apples and savages and an enormous lake with canoes on it and jungles and tigers and elephants and birds of Paradise and how all the princes on the other islands came to see him and brought him spices and all sorts of presents. But they mustn't say anything about it because it was a secret. Afterwards I saw them all talking together and then I saw Mus go and speak to Ramsey major in a corner of the playground and they both stared at me.

After supper Ramsey major came up to me and told me I was a beastly little liar and that he'd a great mind to give me a good thrashing. I said I wasn't a liar and if he thrashed me, I should make such a row that Mr Beasley or Mr Atwood would hear and he'd get a swishing himself. All he said was "You wait" but he never did anything and a day or two afterwards Paddy asked me to tell him and Baby Marr more stories about the island when Mus wasn't there.

viii

I'm not sure when it was I first began thinking so much about Garnett but it wasn't until he was moved out of Upper Second that I knew no one mattered except him.

Hargreaves and I had been pretty chummy for two terms until our row; but I wasn't going to stand his rot about my being a swat, just because I got into Upper Second before he did. The only thing he knows is *Tolle me mu mi mis si declinare domumvis* and he keeps repeating it in a sing-song all day long. I could have been top of Lower Second any time without swatting but I only tried when I wanted to get nearer to Garnett. But no sooner had I got into Upper Second than they moved him into First. After that, I must say I

did swat. I couldn't see into the First class-room from my desk but after I was third from top, I could look through the round windows in the doors and sometimes I could see Garnett. Once he was quite close, standing in front of J. B. and I knew by the book he was doing a *viva voce* construe of Ovid. I translated my Cæsar wrong on purpose not to go up over that fool Chase and leave him where he could see Garnett and I couldn't. Of course he wouldn't understand about Garnett. Only I know, and Mr Atwood. Now I think about it, he always lets Garnett hang about with him. I'm jolly glad Mr Atwood knows and not Chator. I've seen Chator looking at him—often—and go up to him, but I don't think he knows, really, because they don't stay together. And, of course, Chator is captain of the Eleven and Garnett must let him be with him sometimes.

Besides, I could easily get into First next term but it's an awful time to wait. Only if I did once get into it, he'd have to talk to me regularly although I'm only eleven and a quarter. But Chase says I'm a fool to swat for that because they'll never put you into First before you're twelve. They'd rather start Second on Xenophon. Even now Garnett talks to me sometimes, a little bit, especially since I got into Upper Second. Yesterday when Mr Crane put me on at "*erat enim modestus, prudens, gravis temporibus sapienter utens, paritus belli, fortis manu*" I thought that was just like Garnett but of course he isn't clever and I suppose he can't make out how I've caught him up, considering he's thirteen. Miss Norman told me he was the oldest but two in the school. But he doesn't look like it. He doesn't look nearly as old as Bathurst or Foljambe in my class. I'm glad he doesn't. I like him just as he is. I wonder what he is doing now. He's not very good at football, I don't believe he likes it any better than I do. I'm always afraid he'll get his shins hacked by that beast Poole, who's only got his colours because he's a heavy lout. I hate Poole.

It was when Garnett ran second in the hurdle race that I got that feeling. I shall never get over it now. I'd do anything for him—anything. He jumped so beautifully, trailing his leg, quite different to Podge. I must say Podge won the

race easy. But Garnett didn't mind, he never minds anything, especially Podge. And Podge is really a brick. I love that greeny suit of Garnett's, and the way he walks and ties his tie. I'm always trying to tie my tie like that. And his hair always looks tidy without his doing anything to it and it meets together in a little V at the top of his neck. And it isn't that light kind like Paddy's, it's more like the cocoon Mortimer's silk-worms make. When his shoe-lace came undone yesterday, I'd have given anything to do it up for him.

I wonder if there isn't something I could do for him. I must think about it to-night. That's the best time. If only those asses in my room wouldn't talk. They'll have old J. B. after them one of these nights and a jolly good thing too. They stop me thinking about Garnett and first thing I know I'm asleep and all the time is wasted.

If only I could once get a game of squash with him. I'm pretty good at squash ; better than he thinks. If he knew how good I am, he'd want to play with me. And once that began—anything might happen. I wish Mr Atwood could have seen me play squash yesterday. I beat Sully minor easily and he's nearly as good as Sully major and he's the best in the school. If Mr Atwood had seen me play, I believe he'd have told Garnett. Mr Atwood's awfully nice like that.

I wish I knew what Garnett liked. I don't think he cares much about games ; he never seems to try. He goes so slowly at football I simply love watching him and when he gets the ball, he dribbles so awfully neatly ; only as soon as Poole or Nugent or someone charges him, he lets them take it. That's just what I like about him. It's the same with everything he does. He's never in a hurry and he doesn't have rows with anyone. If only I could find one of his books lying about and give it to him or even his cap or something. But he never leaves his things lying about. I've often wanted to look in his desk and I *have* even thought of taking one of his books out and hiding it so that I could find it for him. But I can't—I couldn't. What would he say if he found it out ? And perhaps I should have to tell him and then it would be all over.

Here comes that stupid ass Frisby with his beastly truss

sticking out. I suppose he's going to show me his money again—as usual.

I must think it all over again to-night. If only that cad Neale doesn't start them all jawing so that I can't think about Garnett.

ix

That Easter holidays I got chicken-pox and they sent me down to Ramsgate with Nanny. Thank goodness it was Nanny as I'm certain Mrs Clavis would never have stood Fräulein Schwind. She would have been frightened of her being so ugly and having such a croak in her voice. Mrs Clavis had such a soft voice and she was always smiling instead of frowning like Fräulein Schwind.

The first morning I woke up very early but though I was excited about coming and of course I wanted to get down on the sands, the sea looked so lovely that I didn't mind a bit stopping in bed till Nanny came, just looking at it. It was covered with a lot of teeny tiny dimples like cups with twinkling stars in them ; not all the same though. Those on one side got larger and deeper and more fiery and those on the other side got a darker colour, violet I should think. But it looked like a road you could walk on through the sea and as I watched three little boats with sails up all exactly alike go sailing right across it, I wondered how they could bear to leave that twinkling part and go where it was plain and dark.

Mrs Clavis sat on the sand close to where Nanny sat. She was all in black with a veil flowing over her shoulders on each side and something white across her forehead under the top part of her bonnet. She'd got two children, a boy and a girl, but they were so little they couldn't dig properly so I showed them. But even then they couldn't, so I dug the whole time and sent them for the water. At the beginning I didn't look at Mrs Clavis much and I don't know when it began, but all of a sudden I wanted to look at her and when we came out after dinner I asked Nanny to go to the same place, so that

we could see her again. I didn't say that was why I wanted to go there and I knew Nanny thought it was funny after she had told me about paddling on the rocks. But Mrs Clavis wasn't there so we went to the rocks after all but I didn't enjoy it so much as I expected because all the time I was thinking about Mrs Clavis and wanting to see her.

It wasn't till after tea I knew that Mrs Clavis lived upstairs above us. We were pretty high up but she was higher. There was a wooden staircase with oilcloth down it just outside the room where we had tea and I heard a noise of crying and there was the little boy at the bottom and Mrs Clavis running down to him. Then he had to be put to bed because he'd sprained his ankle and the doctor came.

So part of the time Nanny stayed with him and Mrs Clavis took me and the little girl down to the sea, or if it wasn't fine, to the pier to hear the band.

And I got fonder and fonder of Mrs Clavis.

But I didn't say anything to anyone and I'm not going to. I've got fonder of her than Garnett. I had to be with her because Nanny was with Dan and there was no one else to go out with. And it made all the difference going out with her. Generally I hate walks but I loved walking with her and holding her hand and then Rose got tired and when she told me to go on the other side and hold her hand because I was so big and strong, though I was pleased in one way, I wasn't really. She always made me go on the other side when we held hands and skipped. It was quite early in the morning and we had the parade to ourselves and she skipped so fast I could hardly keep up and Rose's feet were off the ground most of the time. She used to stop suddenly and laugh in such a jolly way. I never heard anyone laugh like that, one time after another. It made me laugh too and Rose. We all stood there laughing and a butcher boy with a basket began laughing as well. Her cheeks were red with skipping and she was out of breath and she stooped down and kissed Rose and then me. I didn't dare kiss her as I wanted to. I wanted to put my arm round her neck and kiss her six or ten times. I pretended even that I didn't want to be kissed at all but I think she knew I did because she looked

at me and then kissed me again. Some of her hair had fallen down by the side of her ear. It was light, something like mine but much prettier and curly, not straight like mine.

When we got back, she told Nanny I was the best boy she had ever seen, she had a good mind to keep me altogether to give an example to Dan because she didn't think Dan would ever be so good as I was. I think Nanny was very surprised so would Mrs Clavis have been if she knew what Fräulein Schwind and papa think about me and what I know myself. But how I wish she could keep me. Of course I was good with her. I wouldn't have minded what she wanted me to do. I'm awfully fond of Nanny too but it's quite different. I don't want to do what she tells me, and I don't care much if she isn't pleased or whether I see her or not. I'm only sorry when I say good-bye to her when I go back to school. It's more like mamma but I'm so little with her and then it's not quite the same. When I go into the room where Mrs Clavis's bed is with Dan's crib on one side and Rose's on the other, I'd give anything to be Dan so that I could be there all the time even when she undresses and goes to bed and gets up. Once I pretended to be looking for her glove under the bed so that I could put my face on the sheet. And when we say good-night I only want to go to bed so that I can think of her like I used to once about Garnett. But Garnett was different altogether though I'm fond of him still. Mrs Clavis is much more like a fairy than any of the fairies in the books and yet I don't want her to be one. I want to touch her and kiss her and know she won't escape. If only I could stay for ever with Mrs. Clavis. What shall I do the day after to-morrow when we go away?

X

When you went into the billiard-room at Craythorne you had to go through a little hall with a fireplace in it. There was another door besides into the lavatory where I often used to hide from Fräulein Schwind. She never dared go into it because papa always went there. So did the other gentle-

men. But though they only came on Saturdays and Sundays, Fräulein Schwind was frightened of that place because she knew men had been in there and used the things. Over the mantelpiece in that little hall, there was a picture I liked looking at. It was two students with leather jackets on and their necks muffled up fighting a duel with swords. Each fighter had another student behind backing him up. All round the room there were other students with different-coloured caps on sitting round and drinking beer and all their names were written underneath and some bars of music with Latin words that I can't quite remember though I know exactly what they mean

Gaudeamus igitur, juvenes dum sumus
Post jucundum juventutis, post something *senectutis*
Nos habebit humus.

Papa told me all these students were at Heidelberg when he was there and Uncle Fred had a duel with one of them. I asked him to tell me more but he wouldn't and Uncle Fred wouldn't either for a long time. Then at last one day he said that those in the picture were corps students and so proud they wouldn't fight with anyone not in a corps. One of them insulted him and refused to fight until he smacked his face in front of all his friends in the Schloss-Garten. Uncle Fred said he nearly cut the other chap's nose off. So of course I was glad when we all went to Heidelberg the summer holidays after my last term at St. Vincent's. But I didn't like it because first of all papa got a German tutor called Kölle who couldn't talk a word of English. We stopped at the Schloss hotel, right up above the Castle and you could see the Neckar and the rafts floating down ever so far below. But the current was too swift to row properly and except for the swimming bath which wasn't bad we did nothing but walk and I hated that. Then the Aunts came. I liked them and they were awfully nice but they wanted to pet me and treat me like a baby and they did nothing but talk German from morning till night. I know mamma didn't like it either. Old Kölle was frightened to death of mamma. He nearly bowed down to the ground whenever he saw her.

It was Heidelberg more than anything that put me against German. I had to learn a beastly poem called *Der Taucher* about *" bis zum Himmel spritzelt das dampfende Gicht "* to say by heart and that made me hate German more than ever.

I was always frightened of papa but while I was at Heidelberg I began hating him. He was always in a rage about something or other and he kept on making me do things I didn't want to do and the more I hated papa the more I loved mamma. She was quite different but I hardly saw her or the little ones either. They were with old Nanny. One good thing, Sissy was with Fräulein Schwind, thank goodness.

What I couldn't make out was why if I was English, papa wanted to make me into a German. At St. Vincent's I always used to stick up for Germany against France but I shan't any more and when I get older I'll take jolly good care not to *schwätzen* any more in German.

xi

Up to the last I was in an awful funk that papa would take me down to Clive. I knew that meant a lot of pie-jaw in the train, very likely in front of other boys. But, thank goodness, he was too busy in the city and mamma took me. It was always dreadful saying good-bye to her when I went back to St. Vincent's but it was worse going to this new place but at all events I should have her a little longer. Mamma had Archer in the *coupé* brougham to drive to the station. I hoped she would have driven the cobs there in her phaeton so that some of the boys might see us but Archer was almost as good, he's a bright chestnut and steps like one o'clock. There was a carriage reserved for mamma and the guard showed us to it but as we came up there was a lady with grey hair and a very pretty face standing at the door talking to a very tall boy. I thought he was a man until mamma asked the lady if she would take a seat in our carriage and she said she had only come to see her son off to Clive. Mamma said it was my first term and the lady said her son could tell me all about everything going down if mamma would like him

to come with us. She said her name was Lady Rendlesham and this was her son Geoffrey Bligh. Then mamma got into the carriage but Bligh stopped outside till the last minute and said " Good-bye, darling mother " and kissed her just as the train started.

I began calling mamma mother to myself all the way down in the train. Mother talked to him and asked him a lot of questions but he didn't seem to mind. He said he was in a college dormitory and this was his last term and that he was going to Sandhurst. He said Thornhill's was the quietest house but not good at games although Cunliffe, the last captain of the Eleven had been there. He was captain of the Fifteen himself. He looked at me a good deal while he said all this in a very nice sort of way and told mother he would look out for me, but he never did anything afterwards except say " How are you getting on, Nipper ? " as he went by. Mother went on talking to him all the way and he seemed to like her awfully. She said she hoped his mother and he would come and see her.

I liked Mr Thornhill at once and Mrs Thornhill was quite pretty. When mother went away after tea in the fly that brought us, I said " Good-bye, darling, darling mother " in her ear, though I'd never called her mother before.

Mr Thornhill took me into a large room where there were two big boys and a piano and left me there. As soon as he went out, they grinned at each other and one of them pointed at the door and said " Hook it." I went up a staircase covered with bags and parcels and bats to a landing where there were no end of boxes with boys sitting on the top of them. Some of them were whistling ; they were nearly all bigger than me. Those who weren't whistling were hammering their heels against the boxes making an awful row. They all stared at me as I came up but they didn't say anything, only went on whistling and hammering. At the end of the landing was the dormitory and the second door on the left had my name on it. There was a boy about my size sitting on top of two boxes in front of it. I stood a minute and he said " New boy ? " I said " Yes." He said " So'm I. Kirk. What's yours ? " I said " Kurt." He said " That's funny !"

I said " Yes, awfully." Then we got to be rather friends and I began to feel jollier. He didn't know anything more than I did but he had the cubicle, as they call it, next to mine at the end. Afterwards he hung up a lot of pictures of race-horses and two foxes' brushes as well as a hunting-crop and spurs, in his cubicle. The cubicle on the other side of mine belonged to Pearson. I got to know him that evening at supper in the room where the piano was. He told me the two big boys I'd seen before were Green and Ferguson and they were in the Fifth and that Green played the piano awfully well and sang songs. Pearson was Scotch and much older than me, two years at least and very broad and thick-set with light yellow hair but he was only one form above. He said he'd let me come with him sometimes to get plants and he'd show me some lovely woods and streams. I began liking being there then, especially when Ashly who was head of the house came into my cubicle and asked if I was all right. He was more like a master, very tall, with spectacles and very sloping shoulders but awfully nice.

After prayers and breakfast the next morning I didn't know where to go or what to do, nor did Kirk. Nobody told us anything and we didn't like to ask for fear of looking like fools. There didn't seem to be any other new boys at Thornhill's so he and I followed the other boys along a road till we got to a big gate. We went through that into the quad with a lot of doors round it and boys rushing in and slamming them. At last I saw one with Upper Middle Two on it and went in. Kirk was in Lower Middle so I didn't know where he went.

The master of the form was Mr Parnell. He was the most awful man I ever saw in my life. He had on a black gown and a black four-cornered cap with a tassel and he had a red beard, not like the pater's but all straggly and untidy and enormous teeth of different colours but most of them black. When I got in, all the other boys were there and he was calling over their names. He made me sit down at the bottom of the form. We didn't do much that morning because Parnell was serving out books most of the time but he heard us construe a piece of Cæsar each. Most of them did it awfully badly especially the fourth boy. He was far the biggest of all and

very fat with little eyes like a pig and black hair that stuck up straight and pimples on his face. He mumbled and muttered so that one could hardly hear but Parnell didn't seem to be listening and went on to the next boy. When it came to my turn, he gave me a place I'd done before at St. Vincent's, so I didn't make any mistakes scarcely. Parnell hardly looked at me. All he said was " Go up to fourth." That put me next above that fat boy and the first thing he did was to pinch my leg so that I couldn't help squealing a bit and when I did that he scowled at me sideways behind his book and hacked me with his heel on the shin. As soon as the form was over Parnell went out of the room and the boys began going out too. I had my arms full of books and had just got to the door when Cox, that was his name, pulled me back by the collar and knocked all my books out of my hands and kicked them about. Then he got me into a corner and kicked me. He said " I'll teach you to go up above me, you little snot," and gave me such a whack in the stomach with his fist that I doubled up.

If it hadn't been for Cox, I shouldn't have half minded my first term at Clive. There was no bullying in the house at all and Mr Thornhill was awfully nice. He was keen on astronomy and had a telescope in the garden and invited some of the boys to come and look at Mars and Venus and Saturn with the rings round it. Some of them laughed and joked about it but I liked it because of astronomy and what he told me about sound and light travelling and the distances between us and the planets and all that and partly because he had an awfully pretty daughter called Ella about my age who came into the drawing-room afterwards with Mrs Thornhill while we had cakes and fruit. One afternoon when no one was looking I went round to the back of the house and looked through the fence between their garden and our part and saw Ella playing with a little girl and we took hold of each other's hands through the fence but we didn't say anything because the lace on her sleeve got caught and all the time was taken up getting her hand back again without scratching it.

None of the boys in the house were in my form so they

didn't know what a brute Cox was and of course I didn't talk about it, except to Kirk and he said I just had to grin and bear it. I thought Kirk was rather a fool but perhaps he was right about that. There was nobody in the house I liked as much as Garnett at St. Vincent's. There was no regular fagging like at Eton but I sort of half fagged for Ashly, fetching him grub and boiling water for his tea. He was very decent too and lent me books but I got the best ones out of the house library. I used to lie on my bed during recreation reading Scott and Bulwer and Dickens. I liked Bulwer best and *Gulliver's Travels* and *Don Quixote.*

It was the Easter term and we were supposed to play footer but I dodged it whenever I could through my toothache because it often made my face swell. It wasn't the game I minded but Cox and Rankin were just as bad at games as they were at work and played with the lower school. Generally I had the luck to be drawn in a game with one or the other and when there was a scrum they made the small boys go in first heads down and they stopped on the outside and kicked them. Ashly, who was a monitor, told me to go to old Dr Marsham but I knew he'd yank out my teeth and I'd found out that if I pulled my blanket partly over my head, the heat almost took the pain away and reading did the rest. Green made me sing the treble parts in *Patience* and got me into the choir so I could get off rugger for choir practice too as well as for my piano lessons. What I liked about being in the choir was that one could see everybody in chapel, the masters, the visitors, the monitors and all the boys nearly. There were two boys who always sat together in the front half-way down who were different to anyone else. They wore patent-leather boots and very tight trousers. One whose name was Darnley was awfully ugly, the other called Kent was awfully good-looking. I never saw one without the other. Kirk told me they were great sportsmen and rode awfully well and that Porter in whose house they were, let them ride his horses. One afternoon Pearson took me a long walk into the woods beyond Crowhill. He was looking for some special plant in the thickest parts when all of a sudden we saw Darnley and Kent. They were lying on their stomachs with their arms

down holes and Kent held up a little animal with a long body called a ferret and smelt his mouth. Pearson said they were hunting rabbits and presently Darnley pulled one out of his hole with another ferret hanging on to him. Another time I was out with Pearson we saw two other boys called Crothers and Dyke lying on the ground too. I saw them first and wanted to go and see them ferret. But they were lying on their backs and as soon as they saw me they got up and went away. When Pearson came up he told me they weren't ferreting and that they were beasts who ought to be sacked. I asked him why and he told me to shut up and mind my own business. Long before the end of the term Pearson's room was full of plants in little baskets and pots. He gave me some and tried to teach me to grow them but I never could, mine always died. He said I should never be a gardener and I don't think so either.

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I never shall like Ennismore Gardens. The middle part, where the hall is, is dark, and I hate having to take my boots off and put on pumps and wash my hands whenever I come in. And they've stuck the little ones right up at the top of the house so I have to climb all those flights of stairs to see Ada and baby. I don't like Miss Durham much better than Fräulein Schwind. I'm jolly glad I don't have much to do with her but I'm sorry for Ada. As for Sissy she always sucks up to everyone so she'll be all right. It's a good thing having Lillybridge to go to and the pony to ride but those Selliger boys aren't much good and the Row's a rotten place to ride in, really. The Knightsbridge school's better fun especially when pater tries to ride Tommy over a jump and comes a cropper like he did last time. Mother rides beautifully and I love riding with her. She never moves from the saddle when she canters and she holds Janet when she pulls, as easy as anything. I like Mrs Mathers awfully though her teeth do stick out and she rides well too with that one rein on a curb bit but she ought to have a martingale on it. Mrs Furzell

rides better in a way. Bernard Selliger says she ought to, considering she was in a circus, his mother said so. I wonder if that's why her face is always so white. Uncle Fred seems to like her but I know he likes Mrs Alhusen better because he was looking at her all the time he was talking to Mrs Furzell when I came in for dessert. I sat down near him and the first thing he did was to make me pass the ginger to Mrs Alhusen just as I was going to have a piece. Mr Alhusen's ripping. It was beastly of pater making me give him back that sov. he gave me. He winked and said " stick it in the other pocket," but it fell under the table and when that fool James went and brought it in on a tray to the billiard-room, he told him to keep it. Pater never gives me more than ten bob himself and makes an awful fuss about that. I don't like Mr Hawke although he plays polo and hunts. He's got such a rotten way of chaffing me as if I was an idiot and he's cheeky to Uncle Fred. And when Mrs Alhusen made me sit beside her on the sofa and asked me if I'd like to give her a kiss he poked his cue into Uncle Fred's back and nodded his head at her. Mrs Alhusen smells of a delicious scent. I was sitting between her and Mrs Furzell and Mrs Furzell said clove carnation was a dangerous scent, if anybody got any on them they couldn't get rid of it for hours and that beastly Mr Hawke roared as though he'd burst. But mother is much more lovely than Mrs Alhusen or Mrs Furzell and after her Lady Anderson. I love Lady Anderson, I always did. I like Sir Hector rather but not so much as her. I hated the sing-song way he read the prayers when I went to stay with them at Osterley but he plays tennis jolly well and I learnt how to do that cut from him. Now we've left Craythorne I don't suppose I shall be allowed to go to Osterley but they've got a house in London too and I hope Lady Anderson will invite me. I like Dick Anderson though he's so much younger than me.

Now Nanny's housekeeper and Florrie her sister is nurse and Keeling is butler ; he's awfully fat and I like him. He told me all about Lord Shrewsbury's country house being burnt down and about Lord Randolph Churchill lying in bed and reading French novels and swearing when he's disturbed.

He can imitate all sorts of instruments even bagpipes and he said John Brown, Queen Victoria's man, drinks half-a-bottle of whisky every night and sleeps with it under his pillow for fear the Queen should find it. Keeling's awfully frightened of Nanny ; mother makes me call her Mrs Clifford now she's housekeeper. Whenever she comes along when he's talking to me he scuttles off. I go in when he's cleaning the plate with a green apron on and help him. He says he's going to marry Florrie but I mustn't say anything and he loves her more than anything in the world.

One good thing is that pater comes back so late I hardly see him as they're always going out or there are people to dinner but he makes me go into his dressing-room while he sticks his head in a great round basin and bubbles and gargles Pierre and water. Then while he dresses, he worries me about how much of my holiday task I've done. I'm supposed to do two hours' work with Miss Durham and go for walks with her and Sissy but mother generally takes me out driving or I ride or go to Lillybridge and play fives and Badminton with the Selliger boys. Pater says if the holidays weren't so short he'd have a tutor because I'm too old for a governess. I told him I didn't mind if it wasn't a German one and he could play games. He said life wasn't games, it was work and how did I propose to earn my living, he had to. I don't know what he does in the city but it can't be very difficult. Keeling says he's got thousands and thousands a year but I mustn't tell anyone he said so.

One evening papa went to his Lodge dinner and mother took me to the theatre with Mr Hawke to see Henry Irving and Ellen Terry in *Romeo and Juliet.* It was awfully sad when they both died, I cried and so did mother but Mr Hawke said afterwards it was quite time that old fool Romeo did die. We went to have supper afterwards at a place called The Bristol and papa came in. He was in an awful temper the whole evening and said it was much too late for me to be up and if I went to the theatre I ought to go in the afternoon with Miss Durham. That's just like him.

I didn't especially like Meyrick. Of course he was an awfully good bat and they had to have him in the Eleven although he was so fearfully stupid that he couldn't get into the upper school. Everything I did seemed to go wrong that term. I know when it started. I was about the middle of the form. I didn't see much difference between Upper Middle One and Upper Middle Two except that the boys were older and thank heaven Cox wasn't there. We all had to do different bits of Latin prose and Meyrick asked me to take his to Thornhill's and let him have it before the form so that he could get to the nets because there was a match on Saturday. He said I should have to swear I didn't do it if Penley asked. What I couldn't make out was why the others all turned round on me; even now I can't understand. Penley gave me a caning as well as Meyrick and if he got stopped playing in the match, I got two hundred lines. Of course Gutekind and his beetles made it worse but how was I to know that? It was only my second term and there I was in Upper Middle One without a single boy of my age to tell anything to and no one in the house either unless you count Kirk who hasn't got out of Lower Middle Two yet. It was the pater's fault I had German lessons, goodness knows I didn't want to sit in that stuffy room full of books, alone with the old blighter. And a lot of chaps started hunting beetles besides me. I didn't know I was his favourite and I didn't want his rotten prize either. I knew something was up when Pearson suddenly turned funny and said he didn't want me when I said I'd like to go to Cold Ash with him. Of course that was through the new house monitor Capel giving me ices in his room. When Green took it up I might as well have been sent to Coventry at once. And I had done simply nothing at all. But the worst of all was the row about Caldwell at the sanatorium; it was a good thing the matron came in. Beastly as it was, I should at least have thought that his nearly getting sacked through me would have shown them I didn't want to suck up to the Sixth and the Eleven. Anything, even Cox and his bullying was better than being

treated as though I was a reptile by all except a few big boys I hated the sight of. Then came poor little Radley's funeral and Cator moving away so as not to stand by me. Radley had his tonsils painted by old Marsham when I did before we were both sent to the sanatorium but I never saw him there because he was in a room by himself with a nurse. His mother and sister looked awfully miserable and when the school band played the Dead March in *Saul* they burst out crying. I ought to have told Mr Littlejohn, I always liked him the best of all the masters and I very nearly did tell him when he found me blubbing at the back of the gym. Then came speech day and I was too miserable to put flowers in my room like everybody else and mother and Captain Forrest came down. It first came into my head when she asked me what was the matter after I left half the strawberries and cream on my plate. I think I should have started blubbing then if Captain Forrest hadn't been there. I shall remember that room at the Clive Arms all my life with all the people sitting at the tables. Of course they thought I was all right because of Taylor and Capel both being there with their people and speaking to me. But Captain Forrest ought to have known that the Sixth aren't any good if the Fifth are down on you as well as all the Middle. But he was Eton and perhaps it's different there. I know if I got into Fifth next term which I could, it would be as bad as Upper Middle One, perhaps worse and I couldn't go on like that.

I wanted to kiss mother over and over again before she went but I never got a chance and I felt as if I was choking when Captain Forrest helped her into the train and gave me a sov. She had given me two after lunch and I didn't want his. I wanted to see her and he stood in front of the window and joked about standing there to keep the people out all the time I was thinking my heart would break in two and wishing I'd had an iron band round it like Faithful John. As soon as the train had gone I went down the lane that leads to Wrecclesham where I knew there was another station and as I walked I couldn't help crying.

Presently a high dog-cart came along with a groom in it and he let me get up. He was an awfully jolly chap some-

thing like Frank but not so smart. I told him all about our horses and old Taylor and Frank and we got quite chummy. He said it wasn't any use going to Wrecclesham as there wouldn't be a train for two hours but he was passing Spitall Junction and I'd get an up-train in half-an-hour. By the way he looked at me I knew he was wondering what I was up to, so I told him the truth straight out as I knew I could trust him. "Bunked it, 'ave you?" was all he said. While I was in the dog-cart with that spanking bay horse with a hog-mane and his short brush-tail almost over the dash-board trotting on in that smooth way Archer did hardly touching the ground, Clive and everything went clean out of my head. All I wanted was just to have my hand on the reins a minute and feel his mouth, but I didn't like to ask the groom. But we were at Spitall Junction in no time and I had to say good-bye to them. I told that chap he was a brick and I hoped I'd see him again some day and asked him to take the pound Captain Forrest gave me but he wouldn't and gave me a wink and drove off.

I'd never taken a ticket before that and wasn't sure what to say but a fat red-faced man said "One Waterloo" and I said the same and when the train came along I got into the same carriage as he did. There were a lot of people in it. I sat between an old woman with a basket in her lap and the fat man. They nearly squashed me and one stank of onions but I got used to it. I thought they might be surprised at my being there but nobody took any notice.

When we got to Waterloo it was quite light and I hadn't made up my mind what to do. I wanted it to be dark so that I couldn't be seen. What I was afraid of was the pater seeing me. I didn't know my way about anywhere. When I got out of the station I saw "Waterloo Swimming Baths" stuck up so I went in and had a bathe. After that I walked into a park and lay down on the grass under some trees. But when it was dark I got into a hansom and told the man to drive me to Lowndes Square because Uncle Fred lived there with Uncle Theo and I made up my mind to tell him everything. A maid I'd never seen before came to the door and said that Uncle Theo was in Paris and Uncle Fred was out

to dinner. Although I didn't think Uncle Fred would be very hard on me, I didn't like to go in and wait. It might be a long time and I should have had to be all by myself and think about everything. So I told the maid it didn't matter and I would go back again, I didn't say where. But I walked up and down in front of the house instead. I thought it would be easier to go up to Uncle Fred outside and say " Here I am " or something. I didn't know what to do really and I began to get awfully miserable. It got darker and darker. Fewer and fewer people passed. It was raining a little. A soldier passed by with a woman. I watched them walking along the shiny pavement until they'd got as far as the third lamp-post. They stopped there and seemed to melt into one.

I sat down once or twice on the bottom step of a house but I looked out for the policeman and when I saw him I walked on. The longer I waited, the worse everything seemed and the more afraid I got, even of Uncle Fred. But I couldn't stay out all night in the rain. Where was I to go to ? Several broughams and hansoms drove up and people got out of them. Each time my heart gave a jump because I thought it might be Uncle Fred. At last I got so tired I could hardly stand up and when a hansom drove up to the very next door and instead of Uncle Fred a lady and gentleman got out, I jumped in. I didn't know where to tell him to go to, but, as I knew the name, I said Piccadilly Circus so that I could think where else while I was driving. But when he stopped in a place where there were a lot of lamps alight and asked me through the trapdoor where to, I hadn't thought of anything. While I was wondering what to do, a lady with a lovely dress and a lot of beautiful diamonds on stopped and looked at me. I wondered if she was a friend of mamma's, mother's, and when she said " Won't you take me with you, my little dear ? " I was awfully surprised. But the cabby was still looking down through the hole at the top and told me not to take any notice of her. Then he said something very rude to her and she looked at me so sadly that I was awfully sorry that the cabby was so beastly to her. Besides I should have loved her to come with me in the cab as I felt so lonely and she looked awfully nice. The cabby got down and came to the side to

talk to me. He was an old chap with grey mutton-chop whiskers. I said perhaps that lady would have taken me home with her and I wanted to go and sleep somewhere, he asked me why I didn't go home and I said my home was in Worcestershire and that I'd taken the wrong train going to school and had got to London by mistake. He said I must sleep somewhere. I'd better come home with him and I said I would. When we got there it was a sort of shop where they sold shrimps and periwinkles. A fat old woman with a red shawl on came outside and the old cabby and she talked to each other. She told me to get out and he was just driving away when I said I hadn't paid him. He said that would do to-morrow and his wife, I suppose it was, wanted me to have something to eat but I was too tired and the smell of fish was awful. So she took me into a little room at the back up a staircase and made a bed and gave me a clean nightshirt she said belonged to her son.

In the morning I woke up with a start. A big boy about seventeen was in the room and I sat up and looked at him. He was in his vest with his braces hanging down and was doing his hair. It was all plastered down except one bit in in front that he was making into a sort of curl and he plastered that down too and put a cap over it with a strap under the chin and then I saw he was a soldier. His trousers were very tight with a broad yellow stripe at the side and he'd got on spurs so I knew he was a hussar. He saw me in the broken bit of glass he was looking into and turned round and said "Hulloa!" I said "Hulloa!" too but I was thinking, supposing he could get me into his regiment! I'd seen boys just as young as I was in the barracks at Hounslow when mother drove over from Craythorne to tea with Colonel Taggart or for polo matches and at Kneller Hall where the soldiers' bands played.

I jumped out of bed and asked him where I could wash and he jerked his head at the door. There was a stable-yard outside and the cabby who brought me was grooming his horse opposite. The sun was shining in his eyes so that he had to put up his hand to see me and I could see all the dust off the horse floating about in a beam across his back and

all at once I began to feel awfully happy. It reminded me of something, I didn't know what, but it had to do with a certain part of the garden, the scent of the flowers and the bees humming at Craythorne, and with Uncle Leopold and with lying on the grass on a fine day at St. Vincent's. But the feeling went away as quick as it came. There was a tap and a bucket and a big piece of soap and a cloth so I had a good wash and got dressed.

Then we had breakfast in a little room behind the shop haddock and the strongest tea I ever drank and watercress. Jim, that was the big boy's name, never spoke a word but he did eat a lot. It must have been pretty early because the milk-girl came in the middle and the old woman came in with a can full lovely and fresh. I didn't dare say anything to Jim about going with him when he got up with his mouth full and said he must be off. He gave his mother a smacking kiss on the cheek and I saw the butter mark. He said " Bye, dad " to the cabby and went out buckling up his belt. The nice old woman asked me what I was going to do next and I said I would go to Waterloo and take the train to Clive College. She said " Dad will drive you there " and so in a few minutes, off we went but first I gave her one of my sovereigns. She said it was far too much but I showed her I had a whole one left and a lot of silver and told her she must keep it and I gave her a kiss but not on the same cheek as Jim. When we got to the station the old cabby asked me if I was sure I was all right and then he drove off and I was all alone again. What was I to do next? I couldn't go back to Clive now, never again. I wasn't sorry I'd run away but I began wondering if it was as bad there as I thought. I was standing beside the place where you take tickets and I heard an old lady say " Third single Ryde, please " and put down a sovereign. So I did the same and got quite a lot of change. I ran on and caught her up and got into the same carriage. I thought she looked rather like Nanny now she is Mrs Cliffie. There was a man with a brown moustache and a bowler on in the corner opposite who kept on looking at me from behind his paper and I thought he looked like a schoolmaster so I made up my mind to keep quiet. After the train started, the

old lady took some sandwiches out of a basket and offered me one but I didn't want any. When she'd finished them she took out a little round box of chocolate creams and I had two but they were very small ones. She began asking me questions about how old I was and where I lived and whether I was at school. I said I lived in London but my parents were in Germany and I had got an exeat but I'd lost my luggage. I had to explain what an exeat was and I let it slip out that I was at Clive and I distinctly saw the man in the corner put down his paper and stare at me. After that the old lady got out some illustrated papers and lent me one and at Winchester the man got out, so he certainly was a master. After that I began talking again. I didn't mean to, but the old lady was so nice that little by little I told her the whole thing and I asked her what she thought I had better do. She said she must think it over and talk to Mr Dixon about it when she got down to Ryde but anyhow I was to stay with her.

It was ripping crossing over on the steamer and when we got there, Mr Dixon was waiting. He was hardly as tall as she was with a wideawake hat and a short grey beard and spectacles. They took me with them to where they lived. It was called Gainsborough Terrace and we had dinner in a small room with a lot of pictures of birds on the wall and two little green parrots in a big cage in the window. After dinner he opened it and they walked about on the table and ate bits of some kind of nut out of his fingers. After that he made me sit down beside him at a desk and asked me where my parents lived. I begged him not to write to them but, if he must write to anyone, to write to Uncle Fred and gave him his address. He said that would be all right and told me I could go for a row if I liked. That was awfully decent of him because it was just what I wanted to do. It was a lovely day, the water was as smooth as glass and I'd seen a lot of ripping boats as we came in on the steamer. He came with me and I got rather impatient because he walked so slow, he had such short legs. But he'd been so nice to me I didn't show it and even when he wouldn't let me go alone, I didn't argue about it. The boatman was a good sort and we had a

jolly good row finishing up at the pier. After tea with jam-puffs in the pagoda Mr and Mrs Dixon took me to a performance by the Orinoco Nightingale and her Troupe of Dusky Maidens. It was lovely but we had hardly got outside when who should I see but Uncle Fred coming straight towards us.

The only disagreeable word Uncle Fred said to me on the steamer was " Don't tell me any more cock-and-bull stories " and he only said that after I began telling him that I'd taken the train from Spitall to London by mistake instead of to Clive College station and that when the dog-cart came along, all I intended to do was to go for a drive. We didn't talk much going up in the train because I didn't know what to say and when I asked him if the pater was in an awful wax with me, he said he was afraid he was and I must face the consequences of my escapade like a man. I was feeling utterly wretched and yet somehow I wasn't half sorry to be sitting opposite dear old Uncle Fred and watching the smoke come out of his nose and smelling the delicious smell of it that reminded me of Craythorne on Sundays. He couldn't have been very down on me because when he woke up from a nap, the moment he opened his eyes he winked and said " Well done, Rindelgrover " and then went off to sleep again.

When we got to Waterloo, the pater was at the station and that was awful. He never even looked at me. Uncle Fred and he talked a minute and when Uncle Fred gave me a kiss and said " Good-bye, be a man " the pater pushed him away and said something in Italian. All the same Uncle Fred turned round and held up his hand to me in that jolly way of his, behind the pater's back. I came near crying when he went away but I managed to keep it down so that the pater shouldn't think I cared. He'd got the tickets for Clive but the train didn't go to the college station, only to Wrecclesham. He never spoke a word all the way down but every now and then, when he thought I wasn't looking, he rolled his eyes at me. The pater's got an awful way of rolling his eyes round and round, I can't think how he does it. He smoked a lot. What a ripping thing it must be to smoke when you're upset about something. If I could smoke, I don't think I should mind anything scarcely. All the time Uncle Fred and I had

been travelling, I was thinking I should see darling mother and Ada and Baby and Keeling and even if the pater was beastly to me, they would have made up for it. I hadn't thought he'd have taken me straight down like this. What was going to happen to me next ? I'd always been told that when chaps bunked, they were expelled. I didn't know what happened when chaps were expelled but I read an awfully rotten book by a clergyman and the boy in it was expelled in front of the whole school for doing something he hadn't done and came back and was top of the school and captain of the rifle team. I don't know if there ever was a rifle team at Clive, I never knew anyone who belonged to it and I shouldn't think shooting at targets all day was much fun. Perhaps I should be swished. That was the St. Vincent's name, they call it something else at Clive. But they don't do that publicly, only before four prefects. It can't be awfully bad except for the disgrace and I'm so disgraced now it can't be any worse. Cox said he hardly felt it but then Cox is a liar, he was in the most awful funk before he went in, and his beastly face looked like green cheese. I hope I shan't be like him. He got it for saying that Beale was a dirty little usher on two quid a week and his washing. It wasn't till then I knew what usher meant. " The usher took six hasty strides, six hasty strides the usher took " I can't remember it properly now.

When we got to Wrecclesham, the pater took a fly and we drove straight to the hotel where mother and Captain Forrest and I had lunch on speech day. It was quite late but he sat down and wrote a long letter and sent it away by a boy on a pony. He never asked me if I was hungry and when I said I was thirsty, he pointed to a jug of water and a glass on the sideboard. I asked him if I could go to sleep on the sofa and he said I might but I'd hardly laid down when the boy came back with an answer. Of course it was from Mr Thornhill. The pater sent the boy away and read it out loud very slowly, something about his not thinking he could persuade Mr Wyke to keep his son at Clive because of the rule of the college that boys who ran away had to be removed. The pater folded the letter up without saying anything and put it away

in his green pocket-book with the gold initials on it that Uncle Fred gave him last birthday. Then he rang the bell and said to the maid " Take this young gentleman to a bedroom." She went to the pater and got some things he'd brought for me in his bag. It was awfully nice of her because I didn't have to go and ask him for them and I couldn't help kissing her. I knew she saw something was the matter and was sorry for me and that made me cry—but only for a minute.

The next morning directly after breakfast the pater took me to Thornhill's. I was dreading the boys seeing me but they were all at their forms except little Bird. He was looking out of the library window so I supposed he'd got hay fever again. Mr Thornhill was much nicer than the pater. He shook hands with me and told me to go into the drawing-room while he talked to the pater in his study. After a bit Mrs Thornhill came in and put her hand on my shoulder and asked me what I'd run away for. I think I should have tried to tell her but Mr Thornhill called me into the study and told me Mr Wyke had decided to let me stay on. But the pater said " That's not quite all, Mr Thornhill. Mr Wyke says, Richard, he will make the great exception of caning you instead and he hopes you will show your gratitude for being treated so leniently." Then he told Mr Thornhill how pleased he was about Mr Wyke being so kind and asked Mr Thornhill if he might go up to my cubicle. When we got there, he took darling mamma's picture off the bracket in the middle of the partition over my bed and said " When you prove that you deserve such a mother, you shall have it back." It was a lovely hand-painted photograph she had given me in a black ebony carved frame, in a ball dress, standing up. Pater knew how I loved that picture. I asked him to take the big photo of the phaeton and pair of cobs with mother sitting with the reins in her hand and Frank standing at their head instead but he wouldn't do that. Then I said there was one thing he could do anyhow and when he asked what that was I said " Go away and never let me see your face again." He said " You'll be sorry you said that some day." But I haven't been sorry yet.

It was all quite different to what I expected. Except Spencer not a single boy ever spoke about my having bunked and I don't think they knew. Instead of being in Coventry it was just the opposite. I don't know whether it was all an idea of mine before or whether it was different through Spencer being so jolly to me, he's awfully popular. It was funny his being in his cubicle when the pater took mother's photo away and hearing the whole thing and then asking me to come and look at his photos so that he could tell me he'd heard and was sorry—awfully decent I call it. Spencer's supposed to be very clever. He's got a tremendous wig of curly light hair and he's in Upper Second on the modern side and he's only a year older than me. His father is Sir Alfred Spencer, the Queen's surgeon and he's her godson. And I must have been wrong about Pearson too because he asked me to help him clean out his cubicle and gave me a lot of plants I didn't know what to do with. But what changed everything was Littlejohn's taking our form because of Penley being ill. Just because I knew by heart "*Otium divos rogat in patenti prensus ægæo nauta*," and that was only through Swanston betting me a pound of grapes I couldn't do it in four times reading over, Littlejohn asked me to come and field for him at the nets. Then he tells me to send him down a few balls and I take his leg stump and the next thing I'm in the House Eleven. That only shows what luck is. I only wish the pater had something more like Littlejohn in him but he hasn't and never will have. Now that I'm certain of my remove, that would have meant Lower Fifth next term and I should probably get into the Second Eleven, he's going to take me away but he never thought of that when I was down. Of course he puts it on my being ill and having to go to the sanatorium again but why didn't he say anything the first time? I don't care, I've got mother and she makes up for everything and thank goodness he's away in the city all day. Of course it was mother who engaged Arthur Stavely, the pater would never have got such a ripping chap. He rows in his college boat and very nearly got into the varsity

Eight. If I've got to have a tutor, I must say I couldn't have a jollier one. The only thing I don't like about him is his hanging about mother so much. I don't like their walking about together in the evening under the cedars.

Longshades is the most beautiful place in the world. The house is very old, hundreds of years and very ramshackly, all dark brown shiny wood inside with little staircases and passages all over the place and the floor higher in some places than others and so slippery I'm always coming croppers on it. In the pantry there's an enormous marble basin with a dolphin's head over it with a tap in his mouth. Keeling says it used to be a monastery and that the pantry is part of the refectory but he doesn't know what a refectory is; I must ask Stavely. Keeling says it's haunted and he's seen an old monk walking about when he locked up the silver in that huge cupboard in the pantry wall and that Florrie's afraid to go upstairs by herself because of the stairs creaking behind her. He says that's the old monk following her up to her bedroom and that those old monks were the very devil after girls like Florrie. The garden goes right down to the water but you can't see the house from the river because of the trees. There's an old mill on a sort of island and the weir is quite close to the boathouse which makes it very dangerous getting boats in and out. I've nearly been over twice, it's rather exciting. The gardens stretch ever so far the other side of the house with big lawns and cedar-trees where mother has the tea brought in the afternoon and beyond the rose garden is the kitchen garden with lovely apricots and peaches on the walls and then the park which goes as far as Haversham with hills covered with woods, full of pheasants and rabbits on one side, and the river on the other and smooth grass in between where I gallop in the morning and before I go home I have to go to the farm-house at the edge of Bindle Wood and have a large glass of milk warm from the cow. I don't care about it but the doctor said I was to have it and I do like the farm and Mrs Braiding and the lovely cool dairy and the smell and the Jersey bull calf and Bill Braiding the keeper.

There's a Roman Catholic chapel you can get into by a

door on the broad landing outside my bedroom. Then you're in a little gallery with chairs in it and a little staircase that goes down below where it's half dark because the windows are very small with coloured glass in them and almost hidden by monuments of old knights and people. But there's always a lamp burning over the altar only it has a very small wick. An old Belgian priest comes for the service. He's a tutor too and he's got some fellows staying with him, French and Belgian, at a funny little house in the village. They seem to spend their time shooting at a target with pistols. I saw one of them kissing Mrs Selliger's French maid Marie when I was out with Bill Braiding feeding the pheasants. Bill said he was one of those damned papists and he'd like to hit him behind the ear. That evening the chap came to dinner with the priest and sang French songs afterwards. His name is Camille de Jongh. When I went up to bed he was still singing and Marie was hanging over the banisters listening so I put my arm round her back and hung over with her until the door opened downstairs and we both flew. I like Marie. She's very dark and has got lovely flashing eyes and she wears pretty dresses that rustle and show her petticoats. Mrs Cliffie hates her and says why can't she talk English like a Christian as if she can help being French. In the middle of the night something woke me up and I jumped out of bed. I always sleep with my door open and I looked through and distinctly saw someone come through the door from the chapel gallery and go into Marie's room. The next morning I saw Marie taking Mrs Selliger's breakfast in and I waited. When she came out I told her I'd seen de Jongh go into her room. It wasn't true because it was too dark for me to know who it was but I'm certain it was him because he could get hold of the key of the chapel. All she did was to put her finger on her lips and move her eyes about and whisper in my ear, " You come into my room to-night."

A few days after that it was a Sunday and we were all sitting out on the lawn having tea. Mr Benda had come down and Uncle Fred and Captain Forrest and Gerald and Nelly Adeane who is Mrs Selliger's daughter had rowed over from Henley. We'd been playing tennis and I was awfully hot and it was

lovely lying there on the grass near mother. She looked so lovely and Uncle Fred and Mr Benda were pretending to quarrel over which of them Mrs Selliger was to dine with when she went back to town next day. Then I saw the pater coming out of the house. I thought he had his eye on me and the next thing I knew was I had to go with him to call on the Belgian priest. I looked at mother and Stavely but I saw I had to go, though I couldn't imagine what for. On the way there he said he was going to ask the priest to give me French lessons, I was doing next to nothing with Mr Stavely and it was time I learnt French. When we got there they were all sitting round in a circle and the priest introduced the fellows to the pater and I had to shake hands all round. There were four of them and they'd all got on tail-coats. One of them called Mérode talked English to me, he wasn't a bad sort of chap and he took me outside and let me have some shots with his pistol. He said he liked hunting but he meant shooting because he said he'd got an English gun. Afterwards the others came out and we went away. On the way back pater told me he'd arranged for me to have an hour and a half's lesson every morning but of course I should have to prepare every afternoon as well, so that would be at least three hours and as I did two hours with Mr Stavely, that would make five which was enough during holidays. After he'd taken so much trouble adding it all up I didn't spoil it by telling him how much work Stavely and I did in that two hours. Then he said what a nice young fellow de Jongh was, so clever and so industrious, the priest said he was the best of his pupils, he could translate Greek into French poetry and he sometimes worked half the night preparing for his examination to be a doctor or something. Why couldn't I take a young man like that for an example instead of thinking of nothing but games and amusements. He hoped now I had the chance I would cultivate this nice young man who had promised him to do anything he could to advance my education. I didn't say anything, just listened to his usual piejaw. But that evening after dinner I got hold of Uncle Fred and got him to come out in the garden and told him what pater had said and that these were my holidays and I

thought it was a beastly chisel to make me swat French with that old Belgian. Uncle Fred said I must be sensible it was all for my good and papa had told him what nice young men Monsieur Larue's pupils were, especially one of them. So then I couldn't keep it in any longer and I told him about de Jongh going into Marie's room. Of course I didn't know for certain, even then, but Uncle Fred looked at me, then he doubled up his lips and said "Um" and we went inside and there was de Jongh singing his songs again and everybody clapping their hands. When I went up to bed, he was hard at it still but Marie wasn't on the stairs and I didn't go into her room and in the morning before he went to the city, pater told me he'd changed his mind about the French lessons because my mother said the doctor wanted me to be in the open air as much as possible.

XV

I don't know why they specially hit on Bournemouth or how they found Pellew. I never can make out why, as it's me who has to go to a tutor, the pater can't ask me what I think about it. He wouldn't have to do what I said but if he only knew it, I should be much more likely to work if he were to go by me and send me to the sort of tutor I like. Pellew is a beast. I knew he was the first moment I saw him by the way he grinned at me. When a master grins in that way, you know he's the sort that loses his temper at the slightest thing and that's just what Pellew does. Mr Beasley never grinned nor did Mr Atwood nor did Mr Thornhill but Parnell did though not in the same way as Pellew, more brutal and less sickly. Of course he's a clergyman, one of that kind that wear long coats down below the knees and a low-crowned soft hat with a rosette in the middle and he's got awful asthma and never stops wheezing and his voice sounds as though he ought to be clearing his throat. When he's in a good temper he's always putting his arm across your shoulders and messing you about to show you how much he likes you but it only makes you feel uncomfortable and hate

him more. When he gets into one of his rages, he glares at you and makes faces as though he was going mad. There are only six of us and we're of all ages. Taverner's the oldest, he's nearly seventeen, then comes O'Hara who's sixteen, then Grantley and Barrett, they're fifteen and I soon shall be, then comes Medway. I like Grantley the best. He's mad on engineering and he's good at mathematics especially algebra but he hardly knows any Latin and no Greek. He stammers when Pellew frightens him and he's awfully shy. He's got a very pale face and a chin that goes back and he looks awful on a horse. That's the best thing about this place, we ride three times a week. That's all we seem to do except tennis but Grantley and I have hired tricycles. He's got a dodge of using his like a locomotive, standing on the iron frame that the small wheel in front goes through and driving it backwards. Taverner's got a curious sort of machine. You balance on a little seat between two wheels, one on your right side and one on your left. Grantley knows an awful lot about machines and he says it's a rotten invention and never will be any good because it's on the wrong principle and he made a lot of drawings to explain why but I couldn't understand them. O'Hara's got a horse of his own, a chestnut with a long tail and a brand-new saddle and double bridle. He rides awfully well and wears swagger breeches and top-boots with cloth tops. He hardly does any work and seems to do what he likes. He's an American and speaks with a queer accent. He's got red curly hair and a red face and I rather like him. He told me he'd got sacked from Harrow but he didn't care and when he'd had enough of Pellew's, he'd get sacked again. He says that's the only game when you're weary but it's all very well for him. His pater lives in California and he says his mother runs the show in Europe and she only laughs when he gets sacked.

Medway's only just thirteen and very small but he's jolly clever and he draws awfully well. He's got the funniest tricks I've ever seen. When he's drawn something, he does horses and people riding chiefly, he pushes the paper forward on the desk and sits back and looks at it, giving it little pokes first to one side, then to the other and while he's doing that,

he rattles his pencil between his teeth and jumps about on his chair and hums out of tune. He works himself up into a regular state doing that and doesn't pay any attention to anybody. Barrett and I made him go on doing it one day till he fell on the floor and writhed about so much that we got in a funk. Perhaps he caught something when he was in India. He lived there till he was eight and came home with an ayah. What with rides in the New Forest and the private theatricals I wouldn't half mind it here if it weren't for Greek with Pellew. Only Barrett and I do Greek. The Odyssey one day, Alcestis the other and Greek Testament on Saturdays. As long as Beddoes takes us, it's all right. He's very tall, six foot at least. He dresses very well and wears striped coloured shirts with a very high all-round collar and tight trousers with stripes and a single eyeglass and is clean-shaved because he's an amateur actor and sings comic songs. He's an awfully good sort and Barrett and I swat rather for him because he once told us that if we didn't get on, he'd have to go. That was after Pellew got into one of his waxes and pitched into him in front of the whole class because Grantley made a fool of himself in his Latin prose. Pellew only takes Taverner regularly every day, but he sees our papers and hears us now and then. I don't think Beddoes knows Greek very well, he's always turning words up in the lexicon, but that beast Pellew does, he's mad on Homer. He reads lines out in a sing-song voice and then gets up and walks about the room waving his arms and saying it off by heart. That would be all right enough but on Saturdays Barrett and I have to take Greek Testament in his study. The first time he was sitting at his writing-table and when I came in he grinned at me in that awful way and stroked his chin just under his mouth with one hand and held up his other for me to come and stand by him. He began by asking me how my cold was or something and stroked the back of my head and grinned more than ever. Then he said, " Well, let's begin " and while I read the Greek and started translating he went on stroking my neck and my back. I moved as far away as I could and after a time he said that would do, I'd done it very nicely and I was to send in Barrett. As soon as Barrett

came out, I asked him what Pellew did. He said he'd made him sit down on the sofa beside him and twisted his hair and tickled his face all the time he was reading and translating. I had half a mind to tell Taverner but when it came to it, I felt shy because I didn't know what to say. Besides, what could Taverner do? Then the rehearsals began and Pellew got so excited about them, he didn't go on taking us in Greek till they were over. And soon after that I got ill and had to go to bed and mother and Dr Burroughs came down and then came the holidays and I went to stay with Grantley.

xvi

It was through Lady Adelaide coming to Bournemouth and asking me to lunch that I went to stay at Bentley Court. Percy would have been too shy to ask me but his mother wrote to mine.

I wasn't exactly pleased to go really but afterwards I was glad I did. For one thing, at St. Vincent's some of the chaps like Ellerby and Hames were always talking about their fathers' country houses and the shooting and the keepers and the hounds and all that and I'd never seen anything of that kind except Bill Braiding and the pheasants and rabbits in the woods above Longshades. I wanted to see what Percy Grantley's father was like to compare him with pater and see how he treated him. But I hated leaving mother during the short Christmas holidays, it was worth putting up with the pater to be with her.

Lady Adelaide came to meet me at Hurstonbury station in a victoria and pair. Percy drove the village cart he'd told me about and took my portmanteau. Of course I'd much rather have gone with him. Mother would never have put on such a shabby old brown cloth dress and awful boots with round leather things round the tops as Lady Adelaide wore and as to the carriage, it was all knocked about and the varnish was cracked and the pair were awful, not a match at all, one was a bay and the other brown, their tails were different lengths and they stood over at the knees. Percy

said afterwards they were old hunters ; they certainly didn't look like carriage horses. We drove past a beautiful old ruin covered with ivy. Lady Adelaide said it was Hurstonbury Abbey and close to it were the gates of Bentley Park and a lodge. We stopped there and Lady Adelaide took a parcel in and stayed some time. When she came out again, she said that one of the keepers lived in that lodge and his wife had just had a baby, the fourth, and that it was a beautiful little boy. She asked me if I had sisters and brothers and, when I told her, she said, is that all, and that she had nine. After a time we could see the house in the distance and when we got nearer we came up with an old gentleman on a very fat cob. I could hardly believe he was Percy's father, he looked so old. There was tea going in an enormous drawing-room and a lot of people. One lady, who looked rather like Miss Durham and about the same age, took me over to the table and asked me whether I'd like coffee or tea, a poached or a boiled egg. She was awfully nice and after a time I knew she was Percy's oldest sister. Afterwards Percy took me up to my room next to his which was miles off down a long passage and up some stone stairs. Everything was stone and it was very cold. He told me there was a shooting party and those men in the drawing-room were the guns. They were going to shoot the outlying covers the next day and we should go with the beaters. What I specially noticed was that everybody seemed to do what they liked and nobody bothered much about anybody else. Everybody called old Mr Seton-Grantley the Squire. He didn't change his clothes for dinner but just had his top-boots pulled off and the buttons of his breeches undone by the butler and he went to sleep at the end and didn't notice when Percy's sisters squirted orange pips at him. The youngest one is awfully pretty and is engaged to Captain Leadbeater who Percy says is one of the best shots in England. He and Lord Densham who married another sister go on like schoolboys, making everybody apple-pie beds and putting wet sponges on the doors. I wonder what pater would think of it.

I didn't enjoy the shooting as much as I expected because of having to kill the animals. Percy showed me how to but

I made an awful mess of it and I could hardly stand it, especially the hares. I liked the meet in front of the house best and running all day and viewing the fox away with that keeper, Jim Watt. It's odd Percy would rather fool about on that rotten little toy railway than hunt. I wish they'd have let me have a horse. Hunting's what I intend to go in for when I get a chance.

Lady Adelaide doesn't seem to bother about Percy at all. I never see as much of mother as I want to, still I do see her and she always knows what I'm doing. Lady Adelaide seems to think more about the people in Bentley village and on the estate than she does of Percy. And Percy doesn't seem to have more to do with his oldest brother than a boy in the Lower School does with a fellow in the Sixth. As to his father, you wouldn't think Percy was his son at all. I really think I'd rather have the pater than be the son of some old chap who hardly knows or cares whether I'm alive or not.

xvii

The next term at Pellew's was awful. He took it into his head that Barrett and I ought to be confirmed. That meant going into his study and having to put up with his rotten talk and pretending to understand things that seemed to be absolute gibberish and yet feeling all the time one ought to be what one wasn't. Even that wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been for his disgusting antics. Over and over again I said to myself I'd write the whole thing to mother but it was so fearfully difficult to explain and I was certain the pater would simply say I was inventing it. You see, there was nothing you could exactly get hold of, it was the sort of way he behaved. Supposing it had been Littlejohn, for instance, he might have done almost exactly the same and it would have been all right because one knew that he was straight and even if one couldn't believe all the things he would have wanted one to, one would have tried. And perhaps, very likely, even one would have told him what one felt. He was the sort of man you could say things to. But

Pellew was exactly the opposite. I knew he was a canting hypocrite like Pecksniff. I don't think Barrett saw it like I did and that was another reason why I didn't write. If another boy didn't think what I did, how could I expect the pater to believe what I said ? I noticed after a bit that when I talked to him about Pellew he didn't say much and gradually I gave up saying anything. I think Pellew had managed to humbug him ; I don't think it was Barrett's fault. Sometimes he went up to his room, we all had separate ones there, and stayed there for an hour nearly. I believe he was reading that little book of prayers Pellew gave us. Pellew told me I ought to spend a lot of time praying but I never did. I just said my usual prayers that Miss Carroll taught me and my own that I made up. I never was in the least frightened by what he said might happen to my soul. The only thing I was afraid of was, what might happen to mother or Ada or Baby or Uncle Fred or old Mrs Cliffie or Mr Benda or someone else I was fond of.

Well, we were confirmed and there was an end of it. But it was an awful term.

xviii

After my confirmation Pellew gradually gave up his tricks. I got rather good at tennis in the summer term and won our handicap tournament but there wasn't much in that as I got a bisque every game from Taverner. He took my beating him awfully well. But that made me useful to Pellew making up sets with Mrs Pellew and her friends. Then came the summer holidays at Rottingdean and riding on the downs with mother and teaching Ada to ride and Mrs Furzell and the Carstairs coming to stay and Uncle Fred and Mr Benda and Giorgio di Minerbi. After that the winter term. Taverner and O'Hara left and Mortimer and Wynn came and thanks to mother I was allowed to hunt twice a month on the condition made by the governor that I worked for the intermediate. My passing it with special mention for Latin verse and prose made him more decent last holidays than he'd ever been before. That's not saying much but still . . .

And now through no fault of mine, he'll be more down on me than ever. If anyone's to blame it's Uncle Fred but I shall certainly never say so.

The whole business happened because of Pellew being mad about Raikes. Raikes came this term, he's about seventeen and an invalid, lungs all wrong, but he doesn't look ill. He's got a milky white skin but plenty of colour in his cheeks and eyes like mother's rather, only bluer still. He's not good-looking like a boy really and his voice and ways are like a girl, awfully gentle and affectionate. No one could be angry with him or treat him unkindly, he wouldn't understand if you did. Besides he'd never give you reason to. He spends most of his time lying on a sofa in the Pellews' drawing-room, reading Plato and Theocritus and Pellew never lets him out of his sight. He didn't come in to the classes with the rest of us and I'm the only one who has seen anything much of him. Why I don't know but Pellew picked me out to be with him sometimes when he couldn't be. That wasn't often. On fine afternoons, he and Raikes lay on the sands, I suppose they were playing at being Greeks. I believe Pellew thinks himself like Plato. Raikes began calling me Richard at once and asked me to call him Douglas. You knew at once he'd never been to a Public School by the way he talked and the words he used. I couldn't possibly have helped liking him but I never felt comfortable with him. I liked to hear him talk, and being with him in some ways better than I ever liked being with any boy. When we were together he always seemed to find something amusing to talk about but utterly unlike other boys. I believe if this hadn't happened and I'd gone on seeing him, I should have got as keen on Greek as he is though I should never have got to know it like him. All the same, after I'd been with him for a time, I was always rather glad when Pellew—Raikes called him Magister to his face—came in and I went back to the others. I felt as though it wasn't myself who was there with him but somebody else and each time the feeling was stronger. I didn't want to like him much but I couldn't help it and it seemed as though if I liked him I must dislike all the others and everything I generally thought and did.

Well, a few days ago, Uncle Fred wrote me he was coming down to Bournemouth for a night and I was to ask Mr Pellew to let me be with him while he was there. Pellew said I could but I must be back by ten o'clock in the evening which I thought quite decent. I went to the station to meet him and I was awfully surprised when I saw he'd got Mrs Brandeis and her brother Giorgio di Minerbi with him. We all drove to the hotel where Uncle Fred seemed to have taken the whole floor. He was awfully jolly, joking and chaffing with Giorgio as he always does. In the afternoon we all went for a walk along the cliffs but Uncle Fred had a carriage to follow us in case Mrs Brandeis got tired. When we got to Branksome Chine we all went down to the sands and there lying in the sun in a sheltered spot was Douglas Raikes and near by was his bath-chair with a boy and a pony in it waiting for him. For a wonder Pellew wasn't with him. Of course I introduced him to Uncle Fred. It's a funny thing but at the very moment Uncle Fred introduced him to Giorgio, I had a feeling that something disagreeable would happen. They all began talking together, Giorgio mostly in Italian as he speaks English very badly and of course he and his sister always talk Italian to Uncle Fred. But Raikes seemed to understand and I could see they all liked him, especially Giorgio. The next thing was that Uncle Fred invited him to drive back to tea at the hotel with him and Raikes was delighted and got into his bath-chair at once to go up to where the carriage was. After tea I thought he'd go but he and Giorgio were talking in a corner and I didn't like to say anything to Uncle Fred although I knew Pellew would be in a rage about his not going back. Anyhow, he stayed all the rest of the afternoon and to dinner besides and drove back with me to Pellew's. We got in just before ten and Pellew was waiting in the hall. I knew what was coming by the way he told Raikes to go upstairs. He followed me in and shut the door and stood and looked at me a moment as though he was considering how he was going to kill me. Then he began. It's more easy to think of what names he didn't call me and Uncle Fred than what he did call us. He raged up and down and hammered on the table and threw

his arms about until I thought he'd fall down in a fit. At the end he said I was to leave immediately. I could go back to my degraded voluptuary of an uncle and stay with him, he wasn't going to have his house and his pupils polluted by such people. After that he calmed down a little and told me to go to bed. That was the day before yesterday and yesterday morning I was expecting to have to pack my things and go round to Uncle Fred's hotel. After breakfast Pellew called me into his study again and told me he wouldn't disgrace me by sending me away on the spot but he was going to write to my father to remove me at the end of the term. He would spare me by confining himself to saying that he considered it would be in my interests to pursue my studies elsewhere. I was clearly to understand that I was not to speak another word to Raikes while I was there but he never mentioned Uncle Fred again. I suppose Raikes told him what a dear old chap he is. But he means to get rid of me. I know, whatever way he puts it, that the governor is quite certain to side with him against me. And if I tried to explain, what could I say? What I believe is that Pellew is mad.

xix

Uncle Cæsar came to Craythorne once when I was a small kid. I think it was the same year old Uncle Leopold was there. I remember his coming to the observatory where I had lessons to hear me say "Under the spreading chestnut tree, the village smithy stands" by heart to Miss Carroll and his making me sit under the elms while he read me his German poem about Craythorne garden and Aunt Justina interrupting to explain and his telling her to be quiet, that I could understand it if I tried. Later when he came to Heidelberg Kölle made me read the *Allgemeine Rundschau* Uncle Cæsar was editor of and I was jolly pleased when he told the governor that *Der Taucher* wasn't a good poem, not a bit the sort he ought to have made me learn. I don't think I saw him after that till now but Wilhelmina was staying with the aunts while I was with them at Hamburg last Easter holidays and

it was through her fidgeting about that I caught a crab in that half-outrigger and fell into the Alster. How she carried on about it! She still says "*Aber Rich-hart*" whenever I chaff her and call her my little *Schatz*. I expected to find it a tiresome business travelling about with my German relations but I've got to like Uncle Cæsar and little Aunt Justina and I shall be sorry to leave them when the governor meets us at Stresa. After that I'm to go to Switzerland with him to the new tutor's he's found at Vevey. Uncle Cæsar's a rare good sort, not a bit of a humbug, and I've learnt more German being with him a couple of weeks than I did from that fool Kölle in six. He meets people he knows everywhere and likes a bottle of wine and what is more likes me to like it. He says "*Guter Wein, guter Schnapps, gute Zigarre, laute gute Sachen aber—keine Frauenzimmer dabei.*" He's very thin, clean-shaved all but a little moustache, and he's got a long nose and long hair brushed straight back from his forehead and falling down his neck and he always wears boots that pull on and go half-way up to the knee under his trousers and a little black tie like you wear in the evening, a soft black hat with a wide brim and a cloak. You wouldn't think to look at him he'd say Bo! to a goose, but you'd make a big mistake. He may be a poet but he's as brave as a lion and he won't stand cheek from anyone.

We arrived at Verona late one evening and we all four left our things at the hotel and went to a café opposite the Amphitheatre to have supper. There was moonlight and we sat outside. After we'd finished Uncle Cæsar went on smoking his cigar and drinking his wine, out of what he called a fiasco, and looking at the Amphitheatre; I expect he was thinking of writing a poem about it. Anyhow, he wasn't bothering about us and once when Wilhelmina was going to interrupt him, Aunt Justina shut her up and said "Can't you leave your father alone?" Wilhelmina fidgeted about and stuck her head first on one side, then on the other and pouted. I thought she looked idiotic and couldn't help making a grimace at her. When she turned her back on me with an offended air, little Aunt Justina and I looked at each other and laughed. It was awfully amusing sitting there watching the

people. The café was crowded and more kept coming and a lot were walking up and down ; ladies, some of them lovely, with diamond earrings flashing in their ears and shawls on and officers with swords and top-boots and spurs and long blue cloaks, frightfully swagger chaps. I didn't mind how long we sat there but Wilhelmina kept on fidgeting. First she turned one way, then she turned another, then she moved her chair and almost knocked a little boy, who was sitting next her with his mother, off his and had to apologise. She was quiet for a few minutes after that but she soon began again. I couldn't think what on earth was the matter and I was just going to ask her when Uncle Cæsar called the waiter and paid the bill and got up. We were walking towards the hotel down a narrow street with very high houses and hardly any lamps. Wilhelmina was walking behind with me and kept on turning round so I turned round too to see what she was looking at. I couldn't see anything to get excited about but some distance behind us, I thought I saw one of those officers in his blue cloak. I took hold of Wilhelmina's arm and asked her in a whisper because I didn't want Uncle Cæsar to hear, whether that was what she was going on like that about, but she pulled away and rushed up to her father and seized his arm and shrieked in German " There he is, he's following me. I'm frightened. I'm frightened." Uncle Cæsar turned round and, though I don't think he saw anything although he wears eyeglasses because he's so short-sighted, he rushed down the street, brandishing his stick with Wilhelmina clinging on to the same arm and Aunt Justina hanging on to the other. I scuttled on past them as hard as I could although I didn't know in the least what I'd do especially if the chap pulled out his sword. Luckily, though I went to the end of the street I couldn't see a sign of him and turned back but Uncle Cæsar went on towards the café still brandishing his stick and those two still clinging to his arms. What exactly happened when he got there I don't know because he made me stay with Aunt Justina and Wilhelmina while he went on. But I saw him talking and shaking his stick at several officers who were sitting at a table and it was quite a time before he came back with one of them. He

was an enormous chap with a glass in his eye and he bowed and saluted and saluted and bowed and little Aunt Justina bowed and Wilhelmina bowed and I bowed while Uncle Cæsar stood up very straight a little way off with his black cloak thrown over one shoulder and his stick under his arm and his large soft hat pulled right down over his eyeglasses. Then we all went back to the hotel to bed.

XX

The governor gave me some Italian money but half of it went on a straw hat in Milan and what with ices for Wilhelmina and me and boats on Lake Como and those Verona donkeys, it had all gone by the time we got to Stresa. I never knew such a fool as Wilhelmina. She always wanted to do everything I did but when there was the slightest danger of a row, she backed out and what is worse she began pie-jawing. I suppose most girls are like that. Sissy certainly is but not Ada. I took her out on the lake three mornings running and I told her the first morning I hadn't any money and that I should have to sell my gold cuff-links so as to pay Antonio before the governor arrived. But as soon as I asked her to help me to find someone to sell them to, she said her dear Uncle Wilhelm would be very angry with her if she helped me to sell the beautiful birthday present my dear mamma had given me. So I let her go back to the hotel and I soon found the little jeweller's shop without her and the chap bought them at once. I might have known she'd sneak to Uncle Cæsar. He began by asking me how much the jeweller had given me and when I told him, he wanted to know why I didn't tell him I needed some money. I didn't like to say it was because I knew he hadn't got much and I was pretty sure he wouldn't ask the governor for it back so I simply said I didn't see why I shouldn't sell those rotten gold links as I had the other pair of silver ones I got for a prize at the lawn tennis tournament. I liked them much better because they went into my cuffs easier. He said there wasn't the slightest harm in selling them, he'd probably have done

the same in my place but the chap had only given me about a quarter what they were worth. I said I didn't care, all the better for him, I'd paid the boatman and I'd got a good lot over and all I cared about was that the governor shouldn't know anything about it. Uncle Cæsar said that was where he didn't agree with me, I ought to have the courage of my acts. I said that was all very well, so I had with everyone except the governor. Why not with him? Because that was just the sort of thing that the governor would make the most awful fuss about, the only way to have any peace was to keep him in the dark as much as I could. Mother was different, but I never should be able to get on with the governor. He said I was wronging my father, I didn't know what a good and kind and generous man he was. I said he might be to other people, he wasn't to me and I didn't think I even wanted him to be. Uncle Cæsar said he was very sorry to hear me talk like that of my father. He asked me if I knew the Fifth Commandment about honouring my father and mother that my days might be long in the land and I said so far all my life he'd never done anything to make me honour him. After that Uncle Cæsar gave it up but I could see he was upset about it.

The governor turned up that afternoon. He was quite decent for a wonder and though he rolled his eyes at me now and then he didn't nag at me during a long drive we took afterwards. I must say he didn't get much chance because I sat on the box and they were all inside.

In the evening, after dinner, I was going down to the lake when I saw the governor at the other side of the drive in front of the hotel walking up and down talking to a stout gentleman and a young lady with a long black veil on. I wasn't sure but I believed she was the very young lady who came into the jeweller's shop just as I sold the links. Now it's a most extraordinary thing but whatever I do, somehow or other the governor finds it out. I went for a little row and when I got back all of them were sitting having lemonade in the hall. When the governor saw me he made me a sign to come over to them and said " Comte Girard is a very old friend of mine, Richard, and this is Mademoiselle Adrienne

Girard." They were French but they spoke English almost like English people. The count said I must come over and pay them a visit while I was at Vevey as he had a villa at Evian and his daughter said her brother was about my age and would be so pleased as he loved English people. She was very pretty and looked awfully nice but I felt a fool because I believed she knew about those confounded links and the governor was sure to have said something to make me look small.

In a few minutes they got up and said good-bye as they were going away by a night train and presently we all went upstairs.

After I'd got undressed and was just going to bed, somebody knocked on the door. It was a waiter and he handed me a little parcel. Inside it were those blessed links and a card "with best wishes from Comte and Mademoiselle Adrienne Girard."

I hardly knew what to make of it. The next day the governor and I drove off across the Simplon and it was only a long time afterwards I discovered he'd arranged the whole thing.

xxi

I don't think I ever had that feeling of being perfectly happy before so strongly as when M'Grath shut the little gate of the garden and we walked down the street together. It might have been the smell of the laburnums that started it because I know I was thinking of Longshades and Craythorne garden at the same time but that wouldn't have been enough. Of course it was a perfect day and at the corner of the street a man was pouring a lot of stuff out of a barrel in a cart that M'Grath said was wine and a pretty little girl was patting the horse and that made me think of the old cabby the morning after I bolted from Clive but that certainly wasn't a particularly happy thing to think about. Besides I kept on getting happier and when M'Grath said something, I couldn't understand at first, I was like in a dream. I couldn't explain when he stared at me and I felt rather a fool. He'd been

asking if I minded going to the hairdresser's (he said *coiffeur*) with him. Of course I was delighted, I didn't mind where I went with anyone so nice as he was. Here was a chap at least twenty years old, perhaps more, beautifully dressed and evidently able to do whatever he liked and yet he treated me as though I was his equal. He wore a straw hat but I'd seen his hair when he came into Madame Jaquelin's salon and she introduced him to the governor. It was reddish and curly and was parted in the middle and he had a little moustache and very nice teeth ; his face was rather like a cat's. He was short and rather square and he had on a thin grey suit and a lavender-coloured shirt and what surprised me, pumps and black silk socks with flowers embroidered over the instep and he carried a little Japanese fan and fanned himself now and then. I felt rough and clumsy beside him in my grey flannel suit and thick-soled shoes. And when he pulled out a beautiful silver cigarette case with a crest and motto enamelled on it and said " Have an Opera Puff ? " I thought he was the nicest chap I'd ever known in my life. I'd never smoked a cigarette anywhere I could be seen before but I don't think he noticed that because I'd often practised in certain places. As we strolled along, he told me he wasn't a pupil at Jaquelin's, he was a *pensionnaire* and spent his time painting and playing the piano but of course he read a lot of French novels and conversed with Madame Jaquelin whom he called " Louise." He said she was a dear and I must be charming to her as old Paul did whatever she told him. I said, of course I would but what could I do and he said, be very polite and buy her a few flowers now and then or a little package of *marrons glacés*, he'd show me where to go presently. He asked me if I was fond of the Arts and when I said I really didn't know, he didn't look as though he thought I was a fool but told me he wrote poetry and he would read some of it to me if I liked. I told him that was awfully nice of him and he smiled at me and took me into a pastry-cook's where we had delicious coffee and cakes. He wouldn't let me pay and said I must always let him pay for me but I said I couldn't do that. I must say I rather admired him and I made up my mind to buy a pair of pumps. He

says they're so cool and easy to put on and in bad weather he wears button boots and if it's very bad, goloshes.

He went to the *coiffeur*. His name is Dupont and M'Grath introduced me to Madame Dupont and said something to her in French I didn't catch but I knew it was about me from the way she laughed and looked at me with her dark eyes. I was too shy to talk to her, especially in French, in fact I scarcely dared look at her. I have been getting worse and worse about that lately, I wish I could get over it because I admire Madame Dupont. Monsieur Dupont paid great attention to M'Grath and powdered his face when he'd finished shaving him and squirted some smelly stuff on his head and curled his moustache up at the tips. All the time M'Grath chatted with him in French and I sat watching and wishing I could be shaved. When it was all over, he bought some soap and scent from Madame Dupont and when we went out I asked him to let me carry his parcels and he said I was charming and gave me the smallest one, putting the string over my finger himself for fear I should drop it.

All the time somewhere underneath I was saying to myself, had the governor any idea it was going to be like this, it was so different to what I had expected and I made up my mind to be as nice as I possibly could to show my gratitude. So though I was hoping M'Grath would propose a stroll under the trees by the lake, or what I should have liked best a row upon the lake, when he asked me if I didn't think it was very hot and if I liked he would play to me in Madame Jaquelin's salon which was delightfully cool, I said yes at once and we strolled back to the Villa Printannière. At the garden gate he picked some jasmine and put a sprig in his button-hole and handed one to me. I don't really like the scent of jasmine, it's too strong, but I pretended I did to please him.

As we went up a flight of wooden steps to the verandah I saw a young chap about my age in a pair of rather dirty white flannel trousers with a cap on, sitting on a seat in the garden doing something with a stick in a bottle. He looked up and stared at me and then went on stirring with the stick but M'Grath took no notice of him and knocked on a door. It was Madame Jaquelin's salon; against the wall there

was a piano. He said the fellow outside was Coward, he was a rough cad and those were maggots in the bottle, ugh ! disgusting and held up both his hands. They were very small and white and he wore two rings that sparkled. He said he wouldn't play " classics," something light and easy, did I like Strauss ? He didn't wait for an answer but started playing *Wienerblut* with a great deal of expression, I thought, and he kept the loud pedal down all the time. After he'd played *Künstlerleben* and *Schöne blaue Donau* the door opened a little and Madame Jaquelin looked in. He jumped up and pulled her into the room while she pretended not to want to. I couldn't understand what she said but I could see she liked him very much and she smiled at me too. She had yellowish hair and her teeth stuck out rather and she had on a hat covered with flowers and she was very thin, scraggy in fact, and I wondered how old she was. She had a fold all round her mouth and she wore those kid elastic-sided boots, but she smelt awfully nice and she had a basket full of delicious black cherries. M'Grath popped his hand in and stole one and held it up in front of her face and she wagged her finger at him and said " *méchant*," a word I happened to know. Her fingers were very long, like claws. She said things to me in French which M'Grath translated, that she hoped I should be happy there and not cause her pain like Howker and Coward did. They were terrible, she never knew what they were going to do next. That afternoon Howker had put the little Favre in the pond, that gentle child. He came in soaked to the skin and crying and she'd had to put him to bed. M'Grath said it was disgraceful but I couldn't help wondering what Howker was like and why he had put the gentle Favre in the pond.

Afterwards M'Grath showed me his studio. It was an old coach-house on the opposite side of the street at the back of the Villa Printannière. It was hung about with bits of material and odds and ends of pots of different colours. There was what he called a divan with a lot of cushions on it and easels and prints and several pictures but none of them seemed to be finished. One was evidently meant for Madame Jaquelin, another was of a mountain covered with

snow and a third was of a châlet with a waterfall. To be able to do anything like a picture always seems to me wonderful and when I told him so, he seemed pleased. He said he would do a portrait of me some time and put his head on one side and closed one of his eyes and looked at me with such a curious expression that I felt uncomfortable.

Then he pulled out his watch which he wore in a little pocket in the top of his trousers with a lot of seals dangling from it and said he expected I'd like to put my things tidy, it would be supper-time in an hour. I hadn't thought about my things. There were precious few of them and they wouldn't take more than five minutes to unpack but when I started to go he touched my arm and said " I advise you to keep Howker and Coward at a distance, one must never let cads get familiar, you know." I said " Thanks awfully, I'll look out " because I didn't know what else to say. All the same I wanted to see what sort of chaps they were. Although M'Grath had been so awfully nice to me and I couldn't help liking him, I somehow didn't feel as though we could become regular chums. For one thing he couldn't be less than four years older than me but besides that what I couldn't help thinking was that if I didn't behave and talk in a particular way he would chuck me. That meant that I should never be able to say and do whatever came into my head and that's exactly what I like most. As I went up the stairs to my room, I heard somebody say " That new chap's palling with M'Grath, he must be a ninny." If it hadn't been for what M'Grath had said, I'd have jolly well routed those fellows out to show them the sort of ninny I was but there wasn't any hurry. I wasn't at all sure I knew what M'Grath meant by a cad. At Clive we called people we didn't like cads. If a chap bagged your braces or your sweater you called him a cad but it mightn't mean anything as he might be a ripping good sort.

I dragged my portmanteau across the floor and unstrapped it but I couldn't find the key anywhere. The governor made me lock it up, I never do as a rule, I never can see the use and of course I'd lost the beastly key. I began swearing like one o'clock and in came a huge lanky chap with black hair

sticking straight up off his forehead and the most sloping shoulders I'd ever seen. He must have been over six foot. We stood there grinning at each other and I told him I'd lost the key. He said " Let's have a look " and went down on his knees and turned the bally thing over first one way then another as though he was looking for a hole in it. Then he said he'd fix it and went out of the room. Presently he came back with a screw-driver and a hammer and after one or two whacks it flew open and, as I'd packed it jolly full, a whole lot of things scattered all over the place. While I picked them up he sat down on the bed and watched me. He said his name was Howker and he'd been to Harrow, he and Coward were the only two English at Jaquelin's and Coward was a bit slow but a real good chap if you gave him time. He said he didn't count M'Grath, he was a little stinker. I said he'd been awfully nice to me, what was wrong with him. He said I should see, he was a swab. I asked him what I was supposed to wear at supper. He said any old thing and that old Paul never washed his hands or his feet either for that matter and that Louise, that's Madame Jaquelin, sparred with him but he didn't care, he was a good old sort. While he was talking the other chap Coward came in. He looked about seventeen too but he was short and thick-set and his hair was plastered down on his head. He had very light eyes and his mouth was half open but he looked a good-natured sort of cove. I got up and shook hands with him. They stopped in my room while I washed my face and hands and brushed my hair and Howker wanted to know what I thought of M'Grath's pumps. I suppose the right thing would have been to say " Look here, Howker, I can't allow you to talk against a fellow who's been so decent to me " but instead of that I sniggered and began thinking pumps were rather ridiculous. So they are when you come to think about it. Howker went on about M'Grath's boots buttoning half-way up his calf and the buttons being all close together and the toes pointed like a pin. He asked Coward if it wasn't true but Coward didn't say anything, he only grinned. I didn't like this running M'Grath down but I didn't defend him. After all I didn't know anything about

him, it wasn't as though he'd been a chum. But I changed the subject and asked how many hours' grind we did. Howker said there was French dictation from nine till ten-thirty with old Paul, sometimes *comptabilité et commerce* afterwards. After that the under-master, called Cuénod, took the history and economic geography class but they made a row so as to get him into a bait and when it was hot they bathed. In the afternoons they cleared out and took boats or sailed or played tennis at the Hôtel des Alpes. In the evening they were supposed to do French literature with old Louise but they were never there and she'd pretty well given them up. I said " Then we only do about a couple of hours really ? " and Coward began " Except " but Howker broke in and said " He means except when we go for excursions or fish." He said old Paul loved excursions in the mountains but there's one thing, they always talked French at meals and when he was about. I was very surprised they could talk French but Howker said one picked it up and as long as one did that, one's people would be satisfied, at least his and Coward's would, because they couldn't speak a word themselves. Old Paul knew that and so long as they did dictation and talked French he didn't much care. " But we won't have Cuénod, will we, Coward ? " he said but Coward didn't answer, he only blinked.

A bell rang and the three of us went downstairs into a long narrow room with a table down the middle, spread for supper. There were delicious-looking rolls at each place and several decanters of red wine. Monsieur and Madame Jaquelin were already sitting in their places and she had on a grey silk dress. In front of him was a large tureen and a pile of soup-plates. Madame Jaquelin didn't take any notice of Howker and Coward but she smiled at me and gave me a place beside her and away from them. Gradually the table filled up, but all the rest were foreigners. Only French was spoken and I could scarcely understand a word except when Howker spoke. I could follow what he said all right. M'Grath did not turn up, Madame Jaquelin said he had been invited out. I was rather glad as I was uncomfortable about what I should do between him and the others, I wanted time to think it over.

I should have liked to keep in with both sides, but if that wasn't possible, I had not yet made up my mind which to choose. After supper, Monsieur Jaquelin invited me into his study and showed me photographs of mountain trips he had done with "*mes enfants*," meaning the boys. Howker and Coward strolled in while he was showing them to me and made themselves perfectly at home. He was quite different from any masters I had known. They didn't seem to mind what they said to him and he was awfully jolly and good-natured with them. When we went up to bed, Howker came into my room again and asked me if I didn't think Paul was a good old sort. He said, one didn't like to ramp too much. It was when M'Grath snaked to Louise that there was trouble. He said "You see we've got a dodge for getting out." I asked him how and he said just below my window there was the roof of the verandah. The window was open and he bent out and pointed down. He said my room was just over M'Grath's and you walked along to the first pillar and slid down, it was as easy as pot. I asked what they did when they got out and he said they went to the Café du Lac and smoked and played billiards. Sometimes when there was a moon they fished. They landed a large ferras last time, trolling, it weighed twelve pounds. But it was too late in the year now. They jolly near got caught too. It was six when they got back and old Paul was about. They saw the old chap mooching round in his night-shirt, his room was at the end. But the real risk was M'Grath hearing them getting out as he'd split on them like a shot, beastly little rotter.

This was exciting and when Howker left me and I got into bed, I lay awake a long time thinking about the ripping things there were to do. All the same I couldn't make up my mind what to do about M'Grath and I felt rather a brute.

Dictation the next morning was rather a joke. Of course I made no end of mistakes. Old Jaquelin read a piece out of a paper and, when he'd finished, he distributed dictionaries and gave us each other's papers to correct. After the dictation we had a few minutes off till Cuénod took us in geography or something.

The schoolrooms were at the end of the garden and, as

soon as old Jaquelin had disappeared into the house, Howker came up to me and said " Let's do a bunk. It's just the day for a bathe." In another minute, he, Coward and I were a hundred yards down the road. We went by the market first and bought cherries from an old woman under a red umbrella, a kilo bag each for about sixpence, big juicy whitehearts. We ate them as we strolled along, spitting out the stones.

It was a jolly little town with one long narrow street. Howker showed me the café where they played billiards and we stopped at a tobacconist's called Rigassi, with whom they were chummy. He had a black beard and they joked a lot. Howker smoked a pipe as well as cigarettes. I bought a pipe and tobacco though I had never smoked one. Then we went on to the baths which were quite at the end of the town.

There was a long wooden stage, with level diving-boards and a high-dive platform. I was awfully fond of diving. We took off our clothes and sat in the sun eating cherries. The water was as clear as crystal and there was just a little ripple in it. Great mountains rose out of the lake and miles away at the end was one Howker said was the Dent du Midi all misty and the top covered with snow. All up our side were vines. Howker and Coward had finished their cherries and had dived in. I was just going to follow them and was sunning myself at the end of one of the low diving-boards, when who should I see coming along but M'Grath. He had a little net-bag in his hand and inside it there was a towel neatly folded and a hair-brush.

I jumped up and went towards him. He waited till I got quite close to him, looked straight at me for a moment and without saying a word, went into a bathing cabin and slammed the door in my face.

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I said nothing to Howker and Coward about the way M'Grath had treated me and pretended not to notice it but underneath I felt small although I knew I oughtn't to as I had done nothing to deserve it. I got on well with Howker

and Coward and for some time, especially at first while everything was new to me, I enjoyed things with them too much to think about M'Grath. It was a beautiful spring and every day there was something for us three to do and we always bathed at least once. Howker told me that he and Coward weren't at all keen on old Paul's walking excursions before but we all three thought the cream at the cowherd's châlet on the Rochers de Naye worth the sweat of the climb. After it got hot, what we liked doing best was to take one of Legeret's roomiest boats and paddle into Latour Harbour, make fast in the shade and smoke and read. At least I read more or less, the others smoked and went to sleep. The old harbour and tower half covered with ivy were very peaceful and a good part of the time I was lying on the cushions in the bottom of the boat watching the swallows skim an inch or two above the water and waiting for the two kingfishers to flash out from under the little bridge where the stream flowed in.

I was surprised how quickly I got to talk French. I think I learnt most of it from Howker because he spoke so badly. I could understand everything he said. Madame Jaquelin started me reading Dumas and Hugo and all at once I found myself reading *Monte Cristo* of my own accord. One afternoon a good *bise* sprang up while we were at Latour and Howker was so riled with me for wanting to go on reading *Les Misérables* instead of sailing that he turned the boat turtle and there we all three were, floundering about in our flannels and all our tobacco and my book at the bottom of the harbour. I pretended to think it a joke but I didn't really and I got rather sick of them. Anyhow I began getting away from them. It wasn't difficult because all I had to do was to go to Cuénod's class for about two mornings. Of course, as I knew they would, being fools, they said I was a swat, at least Howker did. Coward only wagged his head. After that, they went their way and I went mine.

Still, I began to feel rather lonely after a while, I couldn't do nothing but read and I was seriously thinking of making up to M'Grath again. I'd got into the habit of going up to the terrace of St. Martin's and sitting there under the trees and reading. The old church was right up above Vevey and

there was a fine view over the lake. I had it pretty nearly to myself and in that boiling hot weather it was cooler there than anywhere. One morning I was reading *Fromont Jeune et Risler Aîné* and someone sat down on the seat beside me. It was the artist Somerville who spoke to me at the Café du Lac. He didn't say how d'you do or anything but began talking about English and French literature. I can't remember what he said except that the English novelists had no style and that most of them were illiterate. Afterwards he took me to his studio close by, a long room with a window at the end opening on to a sort of garden. It was full of pictures, most of them of women without any clothes on. He said that those damned Calvinist Swiss were such prudes they wouldn't sit for him but there was a girl he'd got his eye on at Territet and if I liked, he'd show her to me that afternoon if I met him at the three o'clock boat. I said I should like to come awfully and he gave me a book called *Sappho* and told me to read it after I'd finished *Fromont Jeune.*

When we got to Territet an orchestra was playing at the end of the arcade near the café and there were tables outside. We sat down at one and a waitress came up to us dressed like a Swiss peasant in a black velvet jacket with silver chains in front and short white sleeves and she put her head down to hear something he whispered in her ear. When the girl went away I saw a fat man with bushy whiskers, sitting in a corner smoking a big pipe near the entrance to the café, sign to her and she stood there with her tray in her hand speaking to him. Somerville said that was the girl and the fat man was the boss. He said he'd been trying to get her to sit for some time. If he cared enough about the girl it wouldn't be difficult but he didn't want her on his hands, he'd tried to get her a job at Vevey but there wasn't anything. He asked me what I thought of her now I saw her and I told him I thought she was awfully pretty. He said she wasn't but he'd like to make love to her all the same if he weren't too old to take the trouble ; it had been different once but nowadays he liked the easy kind. He said it was wonderful to have one's life before one like me, he didn't suppose I'd ever made love to a girl. I told him I hadn't and he said I didn't know

what was the best thing in life and it was high time I began. Why didn't I begin on this one, very likely she'd be more generous to me than to him. I didn't know what he meant exactly but while we sat there listening to the music, I made up my mind to speak to her if I got the chance although I hadn't the least idea how to set about it. After a time he said he was going to take the boat to Montreux and have a gamble at the Casino and we walked down to the *débarcadère*. All the way I was asking myself whether I wouldn't go back and try to talk to the girl. The more I thought about her, the more I wanted to. I thought he had been egging me on but all the same what he said made me want to go back and when the steamer came along I said good-bye and went.

But although I'd made up my mind, when I got near the café I got frightened, and when I was almost at the entrance door I turned round and walked away. I did that several times and the last time I saw that old chap with the whiskers sitting smoking his pipe inside near a high desk where an old woman was writing. Then I walked round to the other entrance of the café on the street and I saw the girl looking through the large window. She smiled at me and my heart almost jumped into my mouth but I went in although I was trembling all over. There was nobody at that end of the café and there was a large round pillar in the middle that hid me from the old chap with the pipe. She came up to me and I said I'd like to have something to eat there and she brought me a list of the dishes and stood close to me. I didn't know what to say to her ; I was trying to think but nothing at all came into my head and all the time I was trying to look at the list and see what I'd have. My eye caught a German name and I read out loud " *Kalbskotelette mit Kartoffel salat.*" Then she said " *Ach, Sie sind Deutsch.*" I told her I wasn't but she said I spoke just like a German and she was from German-Switzerland.

I asked her if the fat old man would mind my talking to her and she laughed and said in German " On the contrary, I must take care of the guests." Gradually I got less shy and told her I really had come back only to talk to her because I thought she was so pretty and she looked so nice. She

blushed and said "*Ach was!* You're teasing me" and went off to get my food. While she was gone I began wondering what I should do. The last boat to Vevey left at seven and it was already past six. As it was it would get me in too late for supper and if I missed that boat there was only one train at eight. I wasn't frightened of old Paul but I must have some excuse for being so late. When she came back with my cutlets I told her I ought to take the boat but if I could go on talking to her I would wait for the train. She said she couldn't talk to me much until after she had given the old man and his wife their supper but after that she would hurry over hers and very few people came in the evening so she would bring her work and sit down by me. She brought me *Fliegende Blätter* and said she must go and lay the table for them. Every now and then she came to see if I wanted anything until I finished eating but afterwards I waited and waited and kept looking at the time but she didn't come until I had only just time to catch the train. I asked her to tell me quick how much I owed as I must run. She said she must get a bill and she was so long before she brought it that I couldn't catch the train if I ran the whole way. So there I was and it was no use worrying. I told her the fix I was in. I'd never been to an hotel by myself and felt uncomfortable about having no things with me and being stared at by the porter and waiters. I said if only I could stay there all night I could take the boat in the morning. She said "*Warten Sie*" and took the bill and the money I'd given her for it. It was some time before she came back and when she did, she brought a bundle of work and sat down by me and began sewing. She didn't say anything at first and I asked her if it wouldn't be possible for me to stay there. She looked at me then and repeated "Stay here? With me?" and I nodded but I didn't mean that. What I really meant was that I should have liked to sleep somewhere or other, even on the seat we were sitting on, if she gave me a pillow and a rug, rather than go to an hotel. But she thought I meant in her room and went on to say she would let me but I must never tell anyone and I must do exactly what she told me. I must follow her out when she made a sign and go softly up

the stairs after her and hide in the room where she showed me as the old witch always looked into her room but they slept at the other side of the house and it would be all right once they had gone to bed. I didn't know what to say. I was excited at the idea of being in her room but I was frightened and I was too taken by surprise to think much. So I talked about something else and Wilhelmina came into my head and I told her about the Italian officer at Verona. Magda, that was her name, looked at me again and asked me if I had ever slept in Wilhelmina's room and I told her, never, I'd never slept in a girl's room in my life, I'd never thought of such a thing, but I didn't say I hadn't even thought of sleeping in hers until she told me I could. But I said it was awfully kind of her to let me and that I liked her better than any girl I had ever known. She said she liked me too, that I was a dear boy and that we must see each other often. After a little while she told me I must look out as it was time for her to take me up and she went across the room and I saw her bring the old couple two glasses of beer. Then she came to my side of the pillar and signed to me and I followed her out of the door to the right and up the stairs. Her room was down a dark passage and she took my hand and guided me into it without saying a word. My heart was beating like anything, I could see nothing except a little light through the blind in a very small window. She put her hand on my waist and pushed me under a curtain amongst a lot of clothes and whispered "Keep very still till I come" and went away. The stuffy smell of the clothes was beastly and it seemed a long time, but I don't suppose it was, till I heard steps and someone opened the door and I could see whoever it was had a light. I hardly dared to breathe but it was only a second and in another minute or two Magda came in with a candle and shut the door and pulled the curtain away and I saw where I was. It was a little room with a large bed and the place where I'd been hiding was in the corner. She whispered I was to undress while she went downstairs and tidied up and I did as she told me and was in bed when she came up again. She sat down on the bed and kissed me and I kissed her. I didn't much mind kissing her at the beginning because she

was such a good sort. Then she began undressing and I turned on the other side so as not to see her. It reminded me of when I was a tiny kid. I remembered how if ever I was awake when Nanny undressed I always turned over not to see her. I even smelt that same smell when Magda took off her dress. It's a particular smell their white petticoats and things have and I hate it. Mother's smell is delicious, I always want to kiss her neck and her back when she's dressing or in bed in the morning. Another thing I don't like is when they mess about with their hair and the hair-pins drop. Magda did hers in two long plaits and then she got into bed and put her arms round my neck and kissed me over and over again. I'd have given anything to be back in my own bed at the Villa Printannière.

I don't want to think about that night more than I can help. I'd like to forget it. I hope I shall never see Magda and I'll take good care not to get caught like that again. The whole idea of sleeping in the same bed with a girl is beastly but it's much worse if you hardly know her and she will keep kissing you and you have to keep kissing her when you don't want to and you are longing to go to sleep. Of course if you're married, it's different because you choose your wife and you fall in love with her first and then you get accustomed to each other and being in the same room. Besides you can have two beds like mother and the governor. I shall never forget how glad I was to have that dip in the lake at Vevey. I felt I couldn't see old Jaquelin and Madame Jaquelin until I'd washed away the smell of her skin and her bed. They were in an awful state about my being out all night but I told them what Uncle Fred called a cock-and-bull story about having gone to see Mrs. Selliger at Glion and they forgave me and made me promise not to let it happen again. I only hope they'll never see Mrs. Selliger.

xxiii

About the end of July I got a letter from mother telling me she was going to Switzerland to meet Mrs. Selliger and she

would pass by Vevey and stay a couple of nights. It was a great surprise. I had never had mother entirely to myself before and I don't know how I waited until the day came. When the train came in and I saw her through the window I couldn't believe it was true. Mother's grey poodle Curly jumped out of the carriage first and barked and wagged his tail and there she was, getting out of the carriage and there was John helping her and Ferris behind getting out her bags. It was only when I kissed her dear face and my lips touched her skin under her veil and I smelt her scent again that I realised she was there. I thought she looked lovelier than ever. It was as much as I could do to leave go of her arm while she shook hands with Monsieur and Madame Jaquelin. Then we drove off to the *Trois Couronnes* and Curly jumped up and barked at the horses' noses just as he did at the cobs' at home. Old Schott came out to the front of the hotel with white gloves on and bowed to mother as though she were a queen and took her up to a big salon on the first floor. The windows were open to the balcony with a green awning for her to sit under and look at the lake and on the table in the middle was a vase full of roses. I was accustomed to people treating mother like that, everyone did, the governor most of all. While I was asking her all about Ada and the baby, they call her Olivia now, the waiter brought tea. It was like a dream sitting with her on the balcony with the beautiful lake stretched out below us and the band playing and people walking about on the terrace underneath. She'd taken her hat off and I saw that her hair was made to look white with powder and was done up high at the back quite differently to when I last saw it. There were two little round pieces of sticking plaster, one under her right eye and the other beside her mouth. One wouldn't have thought she'd been in a train for hours and hours, there wasn't a curl out of place and her face looked just the same as it did when she had finished dressing. While Ferris was getting her things unpacked, mother asked me about Jaquelin's and if I was happy there. I said I was but it's curious that I didn't seem to think so nearly as much as I had before. Her coming seemed to have changed everything. I felt all of a sudden as if everything

outside that room had got far away and didn't matter compared with her and as though she had brought with her London and Paris and the people she always had around her. It was almost as if I expected Captain Forrest and Mr Benda to be waiting downstairs or the phaeton to be at the door for her to drive to the Park or Taylor to come for orders or the governor to come in and pinch her cheek and say " How's Poppet ? " and first kiss her hand, then her throat. Whatever she did seemed to be important. She sat reading letters that were waiting for her, she always had masses, and I watched her without saying a word. I wouldn't have interrupted her for anything.

John came in with a large leather case full of things that fitted into it for travelling, a small silver tea service, silver and gold boxes with sweets inside, folding silver frames with photographs of the governor and Ada and Baby and one of grandmamma, smelling salts, scent bottles and all kinds of odds and ends to put about the room. And there were cushions and silk covers to go on the arm-chairs and sofas and a white bearskin to put at the side of the bed. Then he brought a large bottle with an india-rubber ball fixed on the top and squashed eau-de-Cologne all over the room while Ferris pulled the sheets and blankets off the bed and put the others on mother always took with her. It seemed perfectly natural she should travel about like a princess, it had always been the same wherever she was. But for the first time I felt as though I had something to do with it. At home I had never counted one way or the other. I suppose it was because now the governor wasn't there and it was as though she was my mother and nobody else's and nobody's wife. It was just us two together so that she and her beautiful clothes and her jewels which always made people stare and Ferris and John all seemed to belong to me. That made me feel very proud but there was another feeling. For a short time I had got something of my own that the governor had nothing to do with and that he couldn't take away and I couldn't help wishing that mother and I could live together without him. But the feeling didn't last because I remember, when I got back to the Villa Printannière and went to bed, I was sorry

to have thought of him like that and, if I tell exactly the truth, I asked God to forgive me.

XXIV

I think when I left Jaquelin's, it was the first time I ever came home without feeling I had to face something unpleasant. It was also the first time I hadn't left behind me something that was unpleasant to think about. My year or more at Vevey had been on the whole the happiest I had ever spent and when the evening before I went away old Paul and I went up together to the terrace of St. Martin's to watch the sun setting over the lake for the last time, as he said, but really because he wanted to say good-bye to me in private, I felt that I was leaving behind me a kind and true friend. I had, for me, been almost studious during the last months. M'Grath, Howker and Coward had left one by one, the boys who took their places were too young to be any use as companions and I only saw them when I went with them for walking excursions on the mountains. I had become what M'Grath said he was, a *pensionnaire*. This had come of itself; Jaquelin knew quite well that he could do no more for me now that I'd passed the elementary stage. So I had got into being alone a great deal and in a haphazard way I had read a good deal of French and English and had got a notion of history and literature.

I suppose it was my rather solitary life there that made everything seem so strange to me at Ennismore Gardens. I felt like a stranger from the first moment. Except for Mrs. "Cliffie" and John and one old housemaid, all the servants were new. Keeling had married Florrie and both had gone, Ferris had got married too and the new butler, Griffiths, called me Mister. I'd always been Master Richard before.

Ada had grown and went to a day school in Queen's Gate but luckily it was Easter holidays so she was at home. Miss Durham was there still but she didn't seem so bad as before and Ada said she didn't mind her. Olivia, who was a darling little fat thing with short curly hair, whispered to me she

hated her. I told her one hates governesses and masters less as one grows older but she didn't believe it and begged me to come to the schoolroom as much as I could which I certainly shall. In fact it's the only place in the house I feel I want to sit in though it's not any too cheerful. The house seemed fearfully gloomy after the Villa Printannière, so many velvet hangings and draperies and dark green and gold wall-papers and very thick carpets. It all looked heavy ; you don't hear a sound and feel as though you must talk in a whisper. Mother was out when I arrived. The next best thing to seeing her was to go where I could get a feeling of her. So after I'd seen the kids I went down to her boudoir, next to her bedroom. I suppose it wasn't much changed but it looked richer somehow, and darker. There were cream-coloured silk blinds that fell in folds half-way down the windows and some white flowers, I think they were tuberoses, in a tall silver vase, that smelt so strong I could hardly bear the scent. The rugs were thicker than they used to be and there were more gold boxes and scent bottles lying about than ever. I noticed a big photograph, by itself on the bookcase, of a man I'd never seen, standing against a pillar, in evening dress with a band across his shirt and some decorations on the breast of his coat. He had a beard but it was greyer than the governor's and he was stouter and shorter. I wondered who he was. I didn't notice much change in the bedroom except for one thing. There was only one bed and it was put against the wall which was covered with pink silk and there were pink silk curtains all round it. The other side of the bedroom was the bathroom so the governor was on the next floor now. I'd been thinking all the time of mother, longing for her to come, but when I thought of the governor upstairs by himself, I couldn't keep my mind off him and I felt sorry for him, I don't know why. I dare say he's just as happy up there. But I'd always seen his bed by hers and when he got up, he used to arrange it tidily and more than once I'd gone into her room on tiptoe and found her asleep after he had gone to the city and he'd put a rose or a bunch of violets on his pillow for her to see when she woke up. He couldn't do that now.

I went up to see his bedroom and bathroom. His bed was

against the wall in the same way, only without any curtains and it was smaller and instead of silk on the wall, there was a large picture of mother with Olivia in her arms when she was a baby and Ada sitting at her feet and me in a sailor suit standing beside her. All round the room were pictures of my grandparents and the aunts and of Uncle Fred and Uncle Theo when they were young. In the bathroom there was a large basin you could almost have had a bath in. I could see the governor shoving his whole curly head and beard in it and blowing like he always did, he loves water. And there were his bottle of Pierre and the huge bottle of eau-de-Cologne with the basket-work round. I expected he'd want me to come in while he dressed that evening and I wanted to. I couldn't remember anything for him to be angry about and it was so long since I'd seen him.

Then I went downstairs and stood about in the hall and waited. Twice the front-door bell rang and the new butler and the two under-footmen went to open but it wasn't mother, I looked through the window before the servants came ; it was only people calling and leaving cards. Sir George and Lady Bigham and Lord and Lady Rathbourne ; I'd never heard of them. I took up some of the other cards, there was a huge china bowl full of them. A good many were people I knew, like the Mathers, the Furzells, the Alhusens and the Andersons, but a lot of them weren't and I noticed there were ever so many more titles than there used to be. It was past seven and still mother didn't come ; the governor would be in first if she didn't arrive in the next few minutes. I wandered into the dining-room. Griffiths and dear old John were putting the silver on the table ; there were places laid for a dinner-party. It cheered me up seeing John and after I'd shaken hands I asked him to tell me about everything. He waited till Griffiths had gone out by the door to the pantry, then he went to the other and beckoned to me. " I don't want 'im to 'ear, Master Richard," he said. I put my arm in his and made him come into the hall and asked him what was up. He said nothing was up but Griffiths wasn't Keeling and " 'e don't know what I know and I don't mean 'im to." Just as he was going to tell me,

the front-door bell rang and I rushed to the window. This time it was mother. She was in the little *coupé* brougham with Frank driving Archer and Curly following. I thought she seemed tired as she got out of the carriage. She said " How's my boy ? " and I kissed her through her veil. She turned to give an order to Frank and told Curly to go to the stable and be brushed. That poodle understands everything and off he went, tail up as usual, after the brougham. Mother looked at the cards of the people who had called and went on upstairs. When she got to her boudoir, the new maid, even prettier than Ferris, came in to take her sealskin coat and muff. There were a lot of letters lying on her writing-table and while she read them I sat on a big hassock at her feet. Most of them were invitation cards which she told me to put in a silver clip on the table where there were a lot of others. The one on the top was from l'Ambassadeur de France et Madame Waddington. Before I'd had time to speak to her, the governor came in, but so softly that I didn't even see he was there until he bent over and kissed her hand and said " How's my Poppet this evening ? " I jumped up and we shook hands. I can't make out what made me want to kiss him ; I hadn't for years, not since he took mother's photograph away at Clive. It wasn't because of that although I can't forget it but I got out of the way of it and when other fellows told me they never kissed their fathers, I thought it was time I stopped. He put his hand at the back of my head and looked at me. " You look well, Dick, I think your moustache is growing." He laughed slightly as he said that and went on " Let your mother have a look at you." Mother smiled but she didn't look and the governor began asking me about the journey, what time I left Vevey, what the weather was like there and how the crossing was and if the train was punctual. I'd always known him to ask those questions. Then he said " Come along, your mother must dress and so must we." I'd hardly kissed mother and hated leaving her. I bent over her to kiss her but she turned her head so that I only caught her ear and the governor put his hand on my arm and we went out of the room together.

At dinner I was glad to find I was sitting next to Mr Benda as all the guests were strangers to me. He and Uncle Fred came in together so late that I didn't get a chance of saying a word, in fact as I went to say how d'you do to them, I heard mother say " Can't you give up that last rubber when you're dining here, Fred ? " and he gave me a nod and wink as he bowed to a handsome lady in a green satin dress covered all over with diamonds. Afterwards I knew she was Mrs Colhoun and that the tall clean-shaved man sitting opposite me was her husband. As soon as I heard him speak I knew he was an American. Mother introduced me before dinner to Mr Frühling who sat on my other side. I recognised him at once from his picture in her boudoir. As I supposed, he wasn't tall and he was rather stout, the same sort of figure as Uncle Fred but he didn't look so jolly and he had a strong foreign accent. His eyes were rather prominent and he had a large nose with his moustache curling up on both sides of it separated from his beard. He was rather fine-looking in a way and made me feel he knew a great deal and that I had to listen to what he said. During dinner he told me he had given mother Curly and that it had taken him over a year to find him. He said grey poodles came from Siberia and Curly had been brought all the way in a basket by his Tartar servant. When I repeated that to Uncle Fred afterwards he said " Pooh ! all lies." Mr Frühling also told me that Mr Colhoun was a great friend of his and had built the first railway across the American continent, that he owned thousands of miles of railways and was one of the richest men in the world. I asked Uncle Fred if that was lies too and he said " About three-quarters of it." But Uncle Fred was apt to say things like that when he didn't like people. I thought Mr Frühling rather nice. He asked me all sorts of questions about my life in Switzerland and said he was so sorry he hadn't been able to come to Vevey before he met mother and Mrs Selliger at Lucerne.

The man on the other side of him next to mother was the Honourable Kenneth Arundel. I'd been told he was the

nephew of some duke or other and a great swell in society and never went out of London. He was short and thin and spoke in a soft high voice. Mother seemed to be talking most of the time to a very good-looking man with dark wavy hair and very light eyes on the other side of her and as Mr Arundel began a conversation with Mr Frühling I asked Mr Benda who he was. Of course he had to make one of his little jokes " That's Jim the lady-killer " and laugh that jolly thick laugh of his right down in his chest before he told me he was Lord James Stuart and considered the handsomest man in London. He told me that pretty lady between the governor and Uncle Fred was Mrs Sam Lester and that wasn't her husband, it was Colonel Keith. Her husband was an M.P. and they called him " Sober Sam " there because—well—now I knew.

After the ladies had gone the governor introduced me to Mr Colhoun. His first words were " Well, young man, I hear you've been picking up French in Switzerland, what are you going to do next? " I hadn't the slightest idea what to answer but that didn't matter because he didn't wait but went straight on " You should come to America and see what we're doing there. I've been telling your father in another ten years there'll be more miles of railroads in the States than in all Europe put together. D'you know how many miles my syndicate operates? Seven thousand and we're adding another thousand. Call that something? Well now, a bright young fellow like you coming out there with the right people to go to and a father like yours behind him to put up capital, can get right in on the ground floor and grow up with the country. See here, young fellow, by the time you're your father's age you can be a millionaire as easy, as easy as shelling peas. D'you know how I began? I didn't have an old man behind me. I had to light out for myself. D'you know what the West was like when I was your age? Why, from the Alleghanies to the Rockies there wasn't a town as you couldn't have thrown a rock across. St. Louis and Cincinnata weren't more than little frontier settlements. Chicawgo was a straggling village of frame shanties. I've seen herds of buffalo grazing, thousands and thousands of

them, not a hundred miles west of it. St. Paul and Minneapolis were little one-horse townships where Indians traded furs for rot-gut whisky. I tell you, I've seen things hum in my life. And they're going to hum some more yet." He lowered his voice. " D'you know what I've come over here for? I came to place fifteen million dollars of bonds of my railroads and Baron Alger and your people have found the money and it's the greatest cinch—— "

Uncle Fred came and sat down by us and just as he was going to begin again, the governor got up and all except Uncle Fred and I went up to the drawing-room.

I'd got a chance to talk to him now while he finished his cigar and we went into the library together. Two card-tables had been brought out and on them were packets of cards and a lot of different-coloured counters in boxes. " Um, poker, Dick, poker." Uncle Fred pursed his mouth and nodded his head slowly and said " Um " again. I knew that meant he didn't like " poker " whatever it was.

He asked me if I was glad to get back home again. I told him I was but what were they going to do next with me? He said he didn't know but he believed my father had found a coach in the country. " But what for? " I asked. " What am I going to do? A coach is only another name for a tutor and I can't go to tutors for ever." He shook his head. Did I know what I wanted to do myself? I asked him what was the use of my thinking about it unless I knew I could do it. But, supposing I could, what then? Then I'd like to go to Oxford. " And then? " he asked. That puzzled me. What did one go to Oxford for? I knew some fellows went to the bar but I had no ambition to be a barrister. I told him I supposed I could work for a degree but I hadn't a notion what the object of taking a degree was, what good it did you or anything else. Would I work for it if I did go? I said I thought so. I certainly wasn't a student, but there were things I liked knowing like history and literature. He said that was why my father wanted me to go to a coach. I asked him why I couldn't work with one at home, I was sick of always going away, I never saw mother or the kids or him either. " You don't mention your father, Dick," he said.

" Because I don't think he wants to see me. If he did, he wouldn't always be sending me away."

Uncle Fred looked at me a minute, then he threw the butt-end of his cigar into the fire. " Richard, why will you always misunderstand your father ? Why will you not believe that whatever he wants you to do, he means it for your good ? "

I felt uncomfortable when he said that and didn't know what to answer.

" Look here, Richard, you've just come home. You've seen this dinner-party. When your parents aren't out, it will always be like that. Now I ask you, could you work if all the time this sort of thing was going on ? And can you expect to take part in it at your age ? Would it be good for you if you did ? And you wouldn't like being alone all the time, would you ? Ada will soon be going to school again, Olivia has her governess and you couldn't see much of her. Your father goes to the city at half-past nine in the morning. Your mother has engagements all day. Be sensible. You'll be much happier out of it."

As he was speaking, Mrs Lester came into the room with Lord James Stuart and held out her hand to me. " Talking confidences to Uncle Fred ? " she tittered and without waiting for an answer went on, " You couldn't have anyone better to tell your love affairs to, could he, Jim ? " and tittered again. I thought it was an awfully silly thing to say but Uncle Fred looked quite pleased and she started again, " I'm going to be your sleeping partner to-night, don't forget that, Mr Frederick." Uncle Fred looked at her in a funny way and said " I shan't be likely to forget that invitation, Mrs Lester." As she tittered once more mother came into the room with the others and they all sat down at the card-tables except the governor and Mrs Lester who took a seat behind Uncle Fred. As soon as they started playing, the governor made a sign to me and we went into the billiard-room together.

xxvi

The governor's billiards was like his tennis. He took a lot of trouble but he hardly ever brought off a good stroke and

as I took no trouble at all but occasionally some of my shots came off, we played almost even. We only played fifty up but it took quite a time to finish and I missed a chancy cushion cannon at the last instead of an easy pot-shot at red to let him run out, partly because I wanted to give him the fun of winning and partly because all the time we were playing I knew the game was only a sort of marking time while he made up his mind what he was going to say to me and I wanted to make it easy for him. That was the governor's way. He hated coming to the point but when once he did, it all came out pat like something he'd learnt by heart and I nearly always knew by the words he used to begin with, what was coming afterwards.

We put up our cues and sat down on the leather sofa at the end of the room, under the caribou heads Walter Hawke said he'd shot. Then the governor lit a cigarette and began.

" You perhaps don't know, Richard, that your cousins Alfred and Edward Ritter are now at Balliol College where they are studying for the bar." I always particularly disliked my cousins Alfred and Edward whom I considered priggish duffers. The governor used to take me now and then to see their mother whom I called Cousin Matilda on Sunday afternoons, a visit I loathed. " They were prepared for their matriculation which I understand is more severe at Balliol than at any other college at Oxford by a former fellow of that college who is now rector of Collingham in Northamptonshire. He has a vacancy for a pupil and I have arranged for you to go there. Mr Lynn tells me that as your name is not down at present for any college, the best plan will be for you to read for the first university examination as this entitles you to enter most of the colleges without matriculating. Meanwhile I shall make inquiries as to which college seems most suitable for you to go to. I hope these arrangements please you ? "

While he was reeling all this off he never looked at me and I was glad he didn't, but I had to say something. To begin with I thoroughly distrusted any coach those sapping cousins of mine went to. Oxford was too far away for me to think about, I might never pass that examination, and meanwhile I

might be stuck with a beast like Pellew again. But what was I to say?

"Well?" he said.

"Well" (I couldn't bring myself to call him governor, it seemed cheeky, I'd never called him pater to his face and I'd got out of the way of saying papa, so I called him nothing), "I'm awfully sick of tutors, you know."

"But I thought you were so happy with Monsieur Jaquelin."

"So I was but he's an exception. Besides he's an old man and he isn't really a tutor at all, I mean not like an English one. I was practically free there."

"Yes, I don't suppose you worked much. By the way, Richard, don't run off with the idea you know French. The letters you wrote me weren't French at all; I mean, they weren't the letters an educated young Frenchman would write."

I knew that. "You don't expect me to write French like you do, do you? I never shall."

"There's no reason you shouldn't, it only involves application. When I was a boy, I worked because I knew I had to make my own way in the world. I've told you again and again you'll have to."

That was where the governor always went wrong. Did he take me for a born idiot? Couldn't any fool see he was rolling in money? His saying that made me sigh, it was so stale.

"There's nothing to sigh about. It's good for a young man to make his own living, it's discipline, and if one knows that before one can spend, one must earn, one is less luxurious and self-indulgent."

What did he go on like that for? I knew he wasn't luxurious but what about mother, what about the way they lived?

"But that's another question. You said Monsieur Jaquelin was old. So, I fear, is Mr Lynn. He must be nearly seventy. I want you to understand that he's a most distinguished scholar, a gentleman whom it's a privilege for you to live and learn with. You're past schoolboy age now

and you can't be forced to work. You are intelligent enough but hitherto you have shown a complete lack of industry. I am satisfied that if you apply yourself, under Mr Lynn's guidance, you can easily pass this preliminary examination. Your future depends on yourself."

When the governor talked like that, which he'd done ever since I could remember, I had always felt the same. Everything he said was true and perfectly reasonable. As he put it, there wasn't another side. But somewhere in me I couldn't help feeling there was. If I could only have talked to him, I should have said " Look here, father, I don't want to humbug you, I want you to know what I feel and what I think. I'm not the working kind, I don't like work for work's sake. I don't like books unless I can find something in them that interests me. There are books I like and books I don't like. That doesn't mean I like nothing but rubbish but it does mean that I don't like most of the sort of books schoolmasters and professors like. I think Oxford's probably the best thing I can do. But don't expect me to be a scholar and pass examinations with honours and all that sort of thing because I shan't and the reason I shan't is because I don't want to. I don't see the use and the best I shall do is to scrape through a degree and I should only do that to please you. But while I'm at Oxford, perhaps I shall come across someone or other, he might be an undergraduate or he might be a don, who'll have the same sort of ideas as I've got and perhaps he'll know what I'm good for better than I know myself. Anyhow I shall be getting older and I may find a way by myself."

But I couldn't say all this, I couldn't even say a word of it, because the governor looks at things in a totally different way to me. He thinks life means work. I think life only means work if you've got to and the only advantage I can see in being his son instead of, say, Everest's, the old gardener at Craythorne, is that I needn't work for my living, I needn't hurry, I can take my time and find out gradually what I'm good for. All I did say was " All right, papa " (the papa crept out), " when am I to go ? " and all he said was " You're a funny chap, Richard. You don't seem pleased " and as

we went back to the library " I'll talk it over with your mother."

They stayed playing cards so late that I said good-night and went off to bed. But I didn't sleep and when I heard mother go to her room, I looked at my watch. It was past two. My room was on the same landing as the governor's and I looked out of my door and saw his was open. Then I thought I'd go downstairs and see what he was doing ; I don't know what made me. There was only one light below in the hall but the library door was open and I crept up to it on tiptoe and poked my head round it, very softly. The card-tables had been taken away and everything tidied up and the governor was sitting at his table, writing, with a little teapot and cup beside the blotter.

xxvii

I'm more inclined to believe in people and to do what they want if I like the things they say, the way they do things and behave. I believe more in mother and it pleases me more to do what she wants than what the governor wants and it isn't only because I have a tender feeling for her I haven't got for him. She seems to make things worth doing and she never fusses about anything. Things seem to go right of themselves and whatever she does has a sort of importance. When she gives an order or writes a letter or pays a call, at the moment each act has a curious kind of interest for me. Mother never interferes. If she sees me reading she doesn't interrupt like the governor and ask me the name of the book, then if it isn't one she approves of, make some disagreeable remark about it. If she asks me a question, she waits to hear the answer and doesn't snap one up and make one feel a fool. The governor does and Uncle Fred is inclined to. I like being left alone. I don't want to interfere with other people and I don't see why other people should interfere with me. My thoughts aren't like the governor's thoughts. How can they be ? He's nearly fifty and I'm not eighteen. When I'm his age I may think as he does, I hope I shan't but meanwhile I

certainly don't. I may be wrong, probably I am and if so, I want to find it out for myself. I always think the best thing in the Catechism is " Do unto all men as you would they should do unto you " and I try to practise it. When I talk to Ada, I always try to see things as she sees them ; I even try to see them as the governor does but it's almost impossible.

The strange thing is that though books can't force you to listen, they have more influence on me than the governor or Uncle Fred. Now that I look back, I'm sure I shouldn't have hated Fräulein Schwind so much if I'd never read *Grimm's Fairy Tales* and *Prince Hempseed*, I'm certain I shouldn't have thought so much about Garnett if I hadn't read *Eric*, I know I shouldn't have run away from Clive if I hadn't read *Night and Morning* and *David Copperfield* and I'm not at all sure that the beginning of my not getting on with the governor hadn't something to do with my having read *Misunderstood*. But it goes much further than that. While I am reading a book that really interests me I seem almost to become the hero of it myself or at all events I see myself like him and copy his ideas and his dress and his way of going on as much as I can. And when I've read one book and taken up another, if I like it, I change characters again or sometimes I'm part of one character with one person and another character with another person and I'm angry with myself if I can't act as I imagine the character would if he were in my place. Of course that makes me on the look-out for adventure everywhere and I suppose it accounts for my getting depressed when I can't find anything at all to get up an interest in to keep myself going. All I knew about country life before I came here except for the few days at the Grantley's and what different boys have told me, came out of books. Ever since St. Vincent's I've believed that it must be a finer life than any I've been used to and the summer at Longshades helped to make me think so. At Vevey, Coward whose father was master of a pack of hounds showed me lots of photographs and tried to tell me about it. I couldn't get much out of him but he certainly thought it all wonderful. Howker's father was a wool manufacturer at

Bradford but they had a country house and a grouse moor and he hardly talked of anything else except racing ; both he and Coward were mad on that. So, though at first I hated the idea, when I got down to Collingham and found that, except for a couple of hours of what Mr Lynn calls " reading " in the morning, he lets me do what I like, I thought to myself that at all events I had got the chance of seeing what country life was like. And now though of course I can't pretend to know everything, I know something and what I know I can't say I much care for. I've been here since Easter and it's getting towards Christmas. During all this time I've not been home. On the whole I've not minded as much as I should have thought. I think it is very odd ; it doesn't seem to me natural or fair for a father to keep his son away from home for eight months without hardly seeing him. I don't pretend to understand his reason. Mother came once, before she went to Marienbad, just in time for lunch and then off again. I said nothing about going home and she didn't mention it. I love her just as much as ever but I've learnt how to keep it down. It would have been difficult not to show it while she was here, if it hadn't been for Lord James being with her. I wasn't going to show my feelings before him. He drove her in a brake from Wannacote, fourteen miles. It belongs to his uncle, Lord Brecon, and he keeps his hunters there. I went over to spend two nights while she was there but I hardly saw her. The house was full of people for the races and when I asked mother if I could come to her bedroom when she went to bed, she told me I'd better not because I might disturb the Empress of Austria who was in the same wing, although the men were in the smoking-room until after two and kicking up enough row to keep everyone awake in the house. Lord James told me he never stayed more than a week in the country, even in Scotland, it bored him stiff, and never more than a night at his uncle's for hunting. But the Brecons hardly ever go to London ; they have four or five country places in different parts of England, Scotland and Wales and spend part of the time at each. I can understand that a constant change from one place to another prevents their feeling dull especially if they fill their

houses with people all the time. Wannacote is an enormous place with avenues of oaks miles long and I believe they own another larger still. Having estates to look after, being a sort of little king wherever you go, is of course what these people mean by country life.

I know all the people in the village and the farmers. Josiah Aldwinkle's the chief one and one of the old-fashioned kind. He wears a top-hat and a stock and hunts. There's a scamp of a gipsy barber whose name, of course, is Lee and Jim Carter at the Brooke Arms, who's a pugilist, I box with him, and Fred Baines, Mr Brooke's agent and Tom Wood the huntsman. I can understand their saying the country is the only place to live in because they earn their living there and theirs is certainly pleasanter than anything they could do in London, just as I can understand Dick Burge liking to farm better than to be stuck in an office. But what I can't understand is the Mount Desart girls saying they wouldn't live in town for anything. They seem to me to be bored to death. I wonder if it's sour grapes though I know they look down on people who haven't got country places. Old Lynn in his quiet way is the same. One day at lunch he remarked that no one can be in society who doesn't belong to a territorial family. I told him that put my people out and though he said he was referring to a particular kind of society, I knew he meant the only good kind. It brought St. Vincent's back to me again. If an old gentleman can say that, no wonder boys like Lopez and Ellerby and Hames put on airs because their fathers have got estates. All the same I'm afraid that aristocratic idea has something to do with my admiring Ella so much so I suppose I've got something of the sort in me too.

It's odd how one gets intimate with people. Old Lynn spoke of the Mount Desarts as if they were the Royal Family —with bated breath. That's what started me, especially after he said they were so particular about whom they knew. Of course Ella is the one. I wonder if I really care as much about her as I think I do. She's twenty and I'm all but eighteen. The worst of it is when I see her, I never have anything to say. They think an awful lot of a fellow being

a sportsman. I've not had much chance of being a shot but I'm pretty smart at rabbits and old Aldwinkle's son who is Mr Brooke's keeper at Collingham Place says wild duck take more shooting than pheasants and I got two in three shots the other night. I deserved them after sitting in the middle of the ice for hours with the gun freezing my hands. And my riding's all right but one can't take a line on those raw four-year-olds Dick Burge lets me hunt for the making.

The Mount Desarts are a queer family when one comes to think of it. They're down on everybody, even their own brother. It must be something to do with the money Neville lost ranching in Wyoming but he says his father has got plenty. With all their swagger relations they don't seem to do anything but go and stay in Ireland or somewhere even more out of the way than Warnham. The only one who ever does anything is Ella and she only hunts once a week. They won't go out for a walk, they never go to see anyone, they say they wouldn't go to the parsonic tennis parties if they were paid, besides they hate the game. All they do is to sit in the schoolroom and have tea and say everything is awful. I often wonder whether it's only Ella that makes me like going there so much. Perhaps it's because they all seem to like me to come. They must because they are always asking me over for the night. Neville who spends all his time drawing " bad men " and cowboys roping steers says I'm a godsend and that nobody ever talks except when I'm in the house. But Ella is a beauty and I suppose that vague slack way of hers is aristocratic. There must be something in that daughter of a thousand earls business, old Lynn and Tracy are full of it. Tracy says the Mount Desarts are the oldest blood in England and they've never married out of their class. I've got an idea he was having a little whack at me because I had hinted I was rather gone on Ella, it's difficult not to say something to somebody when one feels like that. When he asked me what they did and what they talked about, I couldn't think. They never do anything and as far as I can remember they never talk about anything. When I'm there I have to do all the talking. That's why I have to

invent idiotic stories like the one about my having found a dead fox one morning when I was out after wood-pigeons and walking through Collingham village with it in one hand and a gun in the other and meeting Lord Ashby's hounds and what Tom Wood the huntsman said to me when I told him I'd found it poisoned by Mark's Coppice not fifty yards away from his own poultry-run. I made that up one evening after dinner and every time I go there as soon as old Mr Mount Desart goes down to the housekeeper's room and gets out his pipe, I have to tell it over again to make him laugh. I wonder, as old Tracy's so keen on blood, he doesn't make up to Beatrice. She's only about thirty-five and just the right sort of wife for a well-off, sporting parson. Perhaps he doesn't think his family's good enough. But I don't think they would mind if it weren't. Ella and Ray would be delighted to get her married, they're always having rows with her. There are always rows about something at Warnham and I believe they're generally about money. But they'd probably have them anyhow to make the time pass. I suppose the old man doesn't know, at all events he keeps out of the way. The girls' lives seem to be nothing but meals. Breakfast runs into lunch and if they do anything in the afternoon it's either got to be done before or after tea. Their only excitement seems to be when the hounds draw the Warnham coverts or when their cousin Lord Rye comes down to Sowerby and has a party for the shooting. They talked for weeks about driving over to Bolsover House to call ; Mrs Mount Desart said I must be sure and see the pictures. When we did go at last, Sir George Gresham said the gallery had been shut up for years and all we did was to look at the stables. The girls say Gresham is drinking himself to death and he looks like it.

They asked me all sorts of questions after I stayed at Wannacote, especially about mother. I couldn't help noticing that they seemed to think more of me after I'd been there. Neville says they are snobs. The others may be but I don't think Ella is, although she's as bad as any of them about despising everyone who doesn't own an estate. I wish I knew more about snobbishness, I don't think I quite under-

stand what a snob is. That's through leaving Clive so soon. It's a great disadvantage not to know certain things. All Howker knew was that M'Grath was a snob and that it meant looking up to a lord. I asked him how he knew M'Grath looked up to a lord and he said anyone could see he did and that a chap who dressed like that must be a snob. That's ridiculous. I may be a snob myself, I rather think I am; if I am, I'm one who admires rich, handsome, well-born people and would like to be one of them myself. With the exception of Dickens's, nearly every hero of every book I've read is one or the other or all three. Nobody ever makes a hero or heroine out of an ugly, poor, common man or woman except in fairy-tales and then they always change into princes and princesses. One feels sorry for poor, ugly, common people but one doesn't admire them for being so and one does admire people for being noble and rich and splendid. I don't see how one can help it. I wish I could talk to mother about these things. It's no use trying to talk to the governor. If I told him what I think he'd make me feel small, and say something like kind hearts being more than coronets and simple faith than Norman blood. Of course being clever and knowing a lot and being kind and generous and unselfish are the chief moral qualities but those aren't the qualities I'm thinking about and anyhow it must be easier to be all that if you've got the others.

Another reason why I think I'm a snob is the lie I told Miss Eva Lynn when she came to stay with her uncle in the summer. One evening she began talking about families and genealogies and asked me what county my father came from. I told her his family was Austrian but my mother was English and I went on to say how beautiful she was and how I loved her. She then asked me what her name was before she married my father. For an instant I didn't answer. I felt I couldn't say the truth, which was that I didn't know, because it flashed into my mind that she would have thought it queer, she might even have thought the less of mother for it. So I suddenly made up my mind and said "Burke." "Oh, indeed! the Clanwilliam Burkes or the Evresont Burkes?" I nodded my head. "Yes, that's it, the Clanwilliam

Burkes." "Earls of Clanwilliam and Fowan, Barons of Dartrey and Corso?" "Yes, yes." I went on nodding my head. She asked me what relation mother was to the present earl. I said I really didn't know, she saw none of them because they didn't like my father. After that utter lie, she left me alone but she sat there looking at me as if I'd suddenly changed into a fairy and I knew she'd tell old Mr Lynn. I trembled at the thought of it. But when I went to bed I lay awake thinking. How was it I had never heard my mother's name? The only members of her family I'd ever heard of were Aunt Mary who was the mother of my cousin Mildred, a very stout lady whose surname was Cunningham and a lady who lived with her whom I called Cousin Caroline whose surname was Steele and who was Sissy's godmother. They had a house in the country called Farnham Grange. In my whole life no one had ever mentioned what my mother's surname was though I remember her telling me that she had two Christian names besides Kate and that one of them was Millicent. Was there any reason for this or was it just chance? If only I had thought of it in time I should have told Miss Lynn her name was Steele. But now I've said it, I intend to stick to it until, if ever, I know the right one. After all, what does it matter? If her name were Burke or Vere de Vere, she couldn't be more aristocratic than she is. I hadn't the least intention of making her anything she wasn't and I couldn't make her out better than she is.

xxviii

Up to the last I hoped I should have a chance of talking everything over with mother but one thing or another prevented it until it was too late. At the end everything happened so quickly. It doesn't seem possible now that I was at home nearly three weeks after leaving Collingham and that it's over six since I went up for Smalls. And yet it seems a long time since I rode over to Warnham to tell them I had passed and was leaving Mr Lynn; my good-bye visit, when Ella told me she was engaged to Captain Bingham. When I

knew it, I felt relieved, as though I'd been older and engaged to her myself and then that it had been broken off ; because, really, she was nothing to me. I believe I shall never marry or if I do it won't be because I want to. I know I shall never find anyone who will understand me. I don't know if wives ever understand husbands but if they do they aren't the sort of husbands I should be. I think I was born to be solitary. When I was small, Nanny Clifford and Fräulein Schwind always said I was discontented. It was true. I am discontented and I am afraid I always shall be because whether I'm right or wrong, I know I want something in every way different from what I've got or ever can get. Looking back, I can see that I was always like that. Certainly there were things I liked that other people liked, some books, some games, riding, hunting, rowing, swimming, but only one side of me liked them, not the whole of me. There was always an inside me that wanted something besides entirely different, something that couldn't be explained or done and that wasn't known to me by any particular name, that I seemed to have had some time or other and that all sorts of things reminded me of like the scent of a flower or the rustle of leaves or a broad sunbeam or the glistening of a calm sea when the sun sets. Looking back on my life, I see it like a river separated almost from its source into two streams which keep getting wider apart. And I see that everything I have done all my life, everything I have had to do, has widened that angle and that everything always will widen it. And yet I don't think it ought to be widened. There ought to be some way or other of making those two streams meet again but I don't think I shall ever discover it or if I do, only after many, many years, and by then it may be too late.

I suppose most fellows of eighteen would envy me and think me very lucky to be going for this trip. They would think me very lucky to be on this ship, the *Trave* steaming to New York. I don't think myself lucky, I don't want to go to America, I haven't the least wish to see the States. But I hadn't the will and the courage to tell the governor so when he said Uncle Theo had offered to take me. I tried to say

something, I began by saying something about preferring to go to Oxford, but the words froze on my lips because in my heart I knew that it wasn't that I wanted to go to Oxford. I didn't know what I wanted to do but I knew I didn't want to go to America and that all he told me about the advantage it would be for me to see the New World and about the opportunity I would have of seeing what human enterprise and industry could build up, meant nothing, less than nothing to me. Of course he interrupted me. He talks very well and very quickly and convincingly though he never convinces me but that was not really the reason I gave in or rather that I pretended I wanted to go. It wasn't even because he told me I could come back in three months and go to Oxford if I didn't prefer to remain, although, he said, " I shall be very surprised if you don't find out during that time that America is the country of the future." I'm not really keen upon going to Oxford. I don't think I should gain much from going there. All I do feel is that as I have to go on down this river which always gets broader and uglier and dirtier as it flows on, I'd rather be in the same boat with the sort of men I should know at Oxford than with men like Mr Colhoun. Again looking back, and I always look back rather than forward when I try to think, I see that the reason my time at Jaquelin's was the least unhappy in my life was that I was left alone there and that it was peaceful. I've never been happy except at wonderful moments and I had more of those moments there than anywhere else ; there seemed to be more of my whole self in whatever I did and the memories of the other life came oftener.

Nor do I want anyone to be sorry for me or try to comfort me. They couldn't anyhow. I'd much rather be unhappy and have those moments than be happy like other people and not have them. Besides I know I've got to go on down this river, whether I like it or not, and I'm almost certain that whatever I do, I shall make a mess of it, not because I want to but because I can't help it. And I feel that I might have been saved the worst if I could have explained, if I had at least had a chance of explaining to mother that I don't really care about my life at all and that

the kind the governor wants me to lead could never be endurable. But even to her I couldn't have said that; I should have to be alone with her a long time and tell her gradually and I've hardly ever been alone with her at all; as far back as I can remember I was much more with nurses and governesses than with her. Yet I know that if, in this world, anyone could understand, it could only be mother. But it was too difficult to try during those last three weeks. Where could I have begun and how and when? When I was in her room for ten minutes in the morning with the maid going in and out? When we were riding in the Row? When she drove round paying calls or at tea at Mr Frühling's in Park Lane? Or at luncheon and dinner where there were always people? How many times I said, to-morrow I will, to-morrow I must. And when to-morrow came, it was to-day and to-day was the same as yesterday. And then the day came for her to go to Paris and the evening before, Mr Frühling was there and stayed and stayed—and she was so tired when she went to bed. When I said good-bye to her at the station, I knew I was saying good-bye as well to the only chance I should ever have—not of putting things right —that's impossible, but of preventing their going too utterly hopelessly wrong. For the further I go on down the river, the less shall I be able to resist. If it is yellow and dirty now, what will it be before it reaches the sea?

PART II

CHAPTER I

i

The morning was a most inconvenient time to receive a stranger, especially that morning, as she had been washing her hair, and besides, that ornery half-breed help never got her work done till dinner-time. But there was Richard Kurt waiting downstairs to see her. She began hastily doing up her hair, which, though not as silky as she would have liked, was thick and could be speedily what she called "wadged into shape." She "wadged" it, therefore, and put on her dress, the fastenings of which she had been altering while her hair dried. Pinning down the front with various brooches and scarfpins, gifts from different admirers, she read again the letter she had received the previous day from Frank Waters.

"My dear Nell,—I've just unselfishly given young Richard Kurt a note of introduction to you. He's the nephew of Mr Theophilus Kurt, President of the C.W. and M., who is now in London. Richard's father is rich. I'm not high-flier enough for you.

"He asked if you were a flirt and I told him, as you were the prettiest girl in the South, you might be with some people, I only knew you as what I remain, your old friend,

"F.W."

Glancing in the mirror, she rubbed her nose with an old powder leather and went downstairs.

The young man came towards her from the arm-chair beside the fireplace. He looked hardly more than a boy, tall and very slight. The shutters were half closed, but she could

see that his hair was lightish, that his eyes were dark and that he had a little fair moustache.

"I hope I haven't come at an inconvenient hour, Miss Colhouse?" His accent was very English.

"Not at all. I'm delighted. When did you arrive?" She dropped gracefully and so lightly into the old arm-chair with a broken spring that it didn't even creak, while he stood, stick and straw hat in hand.

"Early this morning. I thought I'd come at once because I shan't be staying long." He fidgeted a little, then sat down at her suggestion.

"Don't you like Manitou?"

"I don't know it, do I? It's not the sort of place I expected. As far as I can make out, there's no sport to be got."

Elinor was prepared for this point of view. In New York, those who were not sportsmen talked as though they were.

"Do you hunt in England?" She asked the question as though it didn't make any difference whether he did or not, but New York had taught her that the hunting brand was the best.

"When I get the chance."

"I suppose your people do."

He laughed. "You should see the governor on a horse."

"Your father isn't a sportsman then?"

"Well, you see, his idea of riding is what he learnt when he came to London as a boy and rode in the Park on Sundays. He hasn't got any seat at all. Now mother can ride. She's got a perfect seat and hands; she's a born horsewoman." He spoke eagerly. She felt he had a lot to say about his mother.

"Where did she learn?"

"Oh, I don't know. Picked it up, I suppose."

She was puzzled. What did he mean by picking it up. "I suppose she lived in the country?"

"I don't know where mother lived before she married the governor." His eyes were dark and penetrating when hers met them, but he frequently looked away, as though he thought he was staring. He spoke very distinctly and his

manner was eager and jerky, with an occasional nervous gesture.

In answer to his inquiry she told him she lived in Waterville but had just come from New York, where she had been visiting a friend. She was aware he was looking at her closely though she pretended not to notice. He appeared to have nothing more to say and she gazed towards the opening in the half-shuttered window. He was on her left, the best side of her profile, as it happened, though both were so good it hardly mattered. She sat back with grace in the low armchair, her arms, bare to the elbow, along the sides and her tapering fingers clasping the edges. Her dress was a little open at the neck and her breast rose and fell rhythmically. She turned, creating another pose, as he got up.

" I must be going ; it's lunch-time. May I come back this afternoon ? I should like to call on Mrs Colhouse."

She restrained any sign of satisfaction. " My mother will be very pleased. We could go for a walk if you like and come back here after."

" I should love to." He went lightly to the door, opening it to a flood of sunshine which lit up his light, straight hair and made him look younger than ever.

But it was the impression she made on him that mattered and she hoped he had taken an alluring portrait away with him.

ii

Her bedroom window commanded the path which was a short cut to the hotel and she watched him from behind the curtain. Again his extreme youthfulness struck her ; he did not look more than eighteen. His figure was unmistakably that of a gentleman ; his loose-fitting tweed suit and brown shoes were un-American.

Her self-made blue dimity dress was suitable for a short walk on a summer afternoon. Its flimsiness set off her slight, graceful figure ; the open neck edged with lace displayed her mellow olive skin. The red roses drooping over the brim of her leghorn hat against her blue-black hair matched the touch

of artifice on her lips and cheeks. Two dark red roses lay on the dressing-table, and as she entered the sitting-room she held them to her finely cut nostrils, standing on the threshold while he came towards her. His admiration, though restrained, was obvious. Any man she knew would have greeted her with a flattering allusion to what she was aware was an artistic presentation of herself. He made none.

" How kind of you to take me out, but it's awfully hot for a walk."

" We needn't go far and we can sit down somewhere in the shade."

They strolled by the side of the lake till they reached a small path which led upwards gently, through stretches of heather, to a timber gate with pine-trees on either side. They had hardly spoken till she asked him to lift the top bars. Slightly raising her skirt, she gave a little run and, touching the lowest bar lightly with her foot, bounded forward like a bird. A few steps farther on were some felled fir-trees to which she pointed with her parasol.

" You mustn't sit on them in that pretty dress." He threw off his jacket and laid it where she could sit with comfort. She disposed herself gracefully and he threw himself down beside her.

" Do you think you can bear a day or two longer here ? " She gazed down at him with a demure expression in her large dark eyes.

" Of course, this is delightful," he broke off lamely. " Do you mind my smoking a pipe ? "

" No ; I like them." No American she knew smoked a pipe.

" I'm sorry, the pouch is in the pocket—may I ? "

She moved herself just enough for him to feel in the pocket ; in extracting the pouch he had to put his hand partly under her thigh and he flushed.

She took no notice of his embarrassment and lay back, displaying carelessly a shapely silk-clad calf. He lit his pipe and leant his back against the log upon which she was sitting. A minute passed ; neither spoke. A bird called in the distance, another answered it, there was a faint lapping of water from the lake beyond. He jumped up and stood facing her,

" I don't mean to fall in love with you, you know."

She lifted her face slowly and smiled.

" Who thought about such a thing, Mr Kurt ? " It was the first time she had given him a name.

" I've thought about it. How can one help it when one's with you ? "

" That's very flattering." Her tone was bantering.

" Don't laugh at me. I want to be friends with you but I don't want to flirt. I don't know how to. I always wonder what these Americans say to girls. They seem to be able to go on all day every day talking to them. What on earth do they talk about ? What am I to talk to you about ? " He looked her squarely in the eyes.

She laughed but she knew it was not the right laugh for the occasion. Her laugh was a source of anxiety. She couldn't get it right, though she had made a special study of it even at theatres.

" Tell me about your life in England. I'd love to hear about that."

She indicated that he should sit down beside her again. He did so, pulling valiantly at his pipe.

" I don't know where to begin. Besides, I've been gone a year."

" Have you been a year in Cliftonburg ? "

" No ; thank God. I was in Canada for nine months with Billy Kartwright."

" Do you mean Sir William Leicester Kartwright, who married Isolde Allones ? " She knew all about the Kartwrights from *Town Topics* and if Richard Kurt was a friend of theirs he must be very well connected.

" Yes. You see, he was in the governor's business. I don't know what he did there—not much, I should think. They got up a big farming company ; the governor put money into it. The company owned land at different places along the line between Medicine Hat and Calgary and Billy Kartwright went along in a caboose organising settlements." He paused and considered an instant. " It was a fine scheme, but when the labourers found out that the Canadians got double as much as they'd contracted for they turned it down.

Billy Kartwright did it all on a grand scale. He got over I don't know how many Polled Angus and Galloway bulls, Clydesdale stallions and Roscommon rams, and they all went wrong—got sick or something—and when the snow came they half starved; they couldn't feed in the snow like the native-bred ones could. The imported ploughs were no good for the soil; nothing was any good. And Kartwright made his friends managers of the farms, Public School fellows and all that, who didn't know the West and took the whole thing as a sort of sporting scheme. One got up a scratch pack of hounds; another started laying out a cricket pitch——" His pipe had gone out; he began relighting it. "You can imagine the rest," he said, between the puffs.

"And what did Sir William Kartwright do?"

"He went off home with his wife and left Blackett and me to run the show." He paused. "Well, perhaps not exactly that. He appointed a Scotch land bailiff general manager but the labourers collared him and stuck him in a cage. He looked like a baboon anyhow." He lay back and laughed heartily at the recollection.

"But where is Sir Leicester Kartwright now?" Elinor was not interested in what happened to the bailiff.

"In England, trying to put things right with his shareholders. I think the governor expected to lose his money, and only took shares to please Kartwright and get me a job. You see, the governor's got a big business. Of course they spend a lot of money, especially my mother; he doesn't seem to care what she spends." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe on his heel and looked up at her. "I love her to spend a lot of money and have everything. She ought to; there's no one like her. But he kicks up a row about my spending a few pounds more than my allowance, and keeps me out here when I want to go to the varsity."

Elinor was puzzled and was framing a non-committal remark, when he got up suddenly and added: "I say, I'm cracked to go on saying all this. That's the worst of me. I can't stop talking when I get started. But please don't think I always do it. I don't know why I did to-day, except

that—— " He paused, and as he stood looking at her his brown eyes glistened.

She rose gracefully to her feet and, slipping her hand inside his arm, pressed it gently.

" I say, you are kind." He kept her hand close to his side as they walked slowly on together.

iii

They found Mrs Colhouse sitting in the porch, talking across the rose fence to Mrs Shuter, who, Elinor considered, was a common old woman. She shot a displeased glance at her mother, turning her back to the boundary, on the other side of which the objectionable neighbour was sitting under a laburnum-tree. When Elinor presented Richard Kurt to her mother, she was unpleasantly conscious that he had noticed her ungraciousness. The deference of his attitude towards Mrs Colhouse and his remark, obviously intended for the ignored neighbour to overhear : " How nice for you to have such a charming garden next door. Isn't that laburnum lovely ? " increased her irritation.

Richard placed a chair for her with its back to the fence, but she ignored the attention and entered the house. Just like mammy to give her away like that with her po' white trash. She flew upstairs, and in her annoyance threw her pretty leghorn hat on the bed with a vehemence that turned it over on its bent brim in a state of abject disgrace. After she had powdered her nose, she felt sorry for it and, giving it one or two restoring pokes, replaced it on her head. When she had removed her shoes and put on high-heeled slippers, dipped her hands in cool water and sprayed herself with essence of lilac, especially after she had taken a good look at herself in the mirror, she felt better. All the Mrs Shuters in the world couldn't alter the fact of her uncommon beauty, and if he thought she had a temper, let him. A girl with a face and figure like hers had a right to a good deal more than temper. She went slowly downstairs, humming and, standing well inside the door, where Mrs Shuter couldn't see

her, suggested their coming into the house. Iced tea and some cakes were on the table, which Mrs Colhouse began serving, but Kurt insisted that she should sit down and offered her the first glass and the plate with sliced lemon. Why did he make such a point of handing everything to mammy first? She made an effort to repress her feelings, but she could not force herself to join in the conversation, and though he looked at her shyly now and then while he talked, she returned monosyllables and he soon got up and said he must be going.

"You have been so kind. I will come and say good-bye before I go."

For an instant her spirits sank, but she collected herself and asked: "There's a dance at the hotel this evening, isn't there?"

"A dance? I didn't know. I say, do come." He advanced into the little sitting-room again. "And you too, Mrs Colhouse, won't you?"

"Mr Kurt, I haven't been to a dance for twenty years, but I daresay Nell will go."

"If there is one, may I come and fetch you?" He looked anxiously at Elinor.

"If you like. But I must know at once."

With a hurried good-bye he ran up the garden path.

"A nice fool you made me look."

"Why how, Nell?"

"I've told you to keep away from Mrs Shuter."

"But, my dear, I can't be rude to our neighbour, and you wearing her roses too."

"I'll pay for them, come to that. I don't want her around when I've got company. She'll get cackling about all sorts of things. I've told you that ever so often."

"But sure-ly that English boy don't matter. He's too young to count, isn't he?"

Elinor felt her temper rising but she restrained herself. "Now, mammy, you listen to me. I know Richard Kurt's young, but he's the best chance I've ever had and probably shall ever have. His parents live in London, and they've got

a big position there. You know I've always wanted to marry an Englishman. His father's rich—how rich I don't know. He says he's got no money himself, but that don't matter, he will have. And I mean to marry him if I can and chance it. That's all there is about it."

Mrs Colhouse threw herself back in her chair and gazed at her daughter with astonished eyes. " Marry him, that baby, and you only saw him to-day for the first time. Lord 'a' mercy. You'd be taking a kid to raise."

Elinor made an impatient sound with her tongue against the back of her teeth. " See here, mammy, you know I've got sense and you know the sort of life we lead. Now I'm determined to get out of it myself and get you out too."

" How did you get to know him ? " Mrs Colhouse asked.

" Frank Waters gave him a letter to me."

Mrs Colhouse looked up inquiringly.

" You remember the time Sissie Warren went up to Clifton-burg to that great ball where there was a baron and came back with her head buzzing full of it. That ball was given by Mr Theophilus Kurt, this boy's uncle, and he's the president of the C.W. & M. He's in London now."

Mrs Colhouse stared at Elinor through her spectacles with a startled expression. " And what would he say to it all ? He'd never want that boy to get engaged while he's away."

Elinor went to the mirror over the mantel and pulled a long pin out of her hat. " I don't intend to be engaged to him when his uncle comes back." She calmly arranged a curl beside her temple.

" Then what do you mean to do ? "

Elinor turned round and tiptoed across the room to her mother's chair with her finger on her lips. " I mean to be married to him," she whispered.

iv

There was a dance at the hotel, and by eight o'clock the combined intensive labours of Elinor and her mother had wrought so great a change in what she called her " old blue

rag " that only an expert could have identified it as the one she wore with such success at the Pomegranate Club Ball two years before. It was of blue velvet, with black guipure and bead ornaments. The sleeves were like elongated balloons. Elinor, born strategist of the wardrobe that she was, laid her plans against emergency well in advance. At odd moments for some time past she had bespangled two square yards or so of the turquoise blue velvet with faceted bits of jet, replacing therewith the more meagre and less salient sleeves of an earlier period. There were other modifications of some significance, but it was the final assembling of the parts that had called for her extreme ingenuity under pressure of time. The effort made so heavy a demand upon her nerves that by the time the work of art had reached safety point her appetite had been completely cut and her only preparation for the evening's contingencies was a glass of cold tea. Mrs Colhouse had stood nobly in the breach, meeting difficulties as they arose, and supplying reinforcements of needles, threads, hooks, eyes, beads, tucks and so forth whenever requisitioned. It was hardly to be expected that such an enterprise could be brought to a successful conclusion without one or two small reverses. One came when, daintily underclothed, perfumed and curled, Elinor raised her arms for her dress to be slipped over her head. A hook caught a strand of hair ; it might have been—ought to have been—avoided. It was true that Mrs Colhouse was not so young as she had been, that she had had no supper and had taken off her spectacles just before to rub her eyes, but it was maddening for Elinor, of whom that coiffure had demanded at least twenty minutes of precious time. She stamped with helpless rage as her mother, making matters worse in her misguided attempts to disentangle the tress, brought the whole delicate fabric crumbling down in ruin.

" Oh, mammy, you old fool, you've done for my hair ; and oh, oh, you're hurting—you're hurting. Oh, dear ! oh, dear ! " and she broke into sobs. It was an awful moment, but Elinor surmounted it. Brushing her mother aside, restraining her tears and concentrating her will, she defeated the hook, extricated her head and drew the dress down,

standing a little dishevelled and breathing hard, but ready, if necessary, for another punishing round. It came. This time it really was a case of criminal negligence. Mammy had actually sewn two hooks where eyes ought to have been, and *vice versa*. Elinor stood motionless, too overcome for utterance. The little brass clock derisively indicated twenty minutes to nine. " Did ever anyone——? Was there ever such a born fool, such a doggorned idiot——? "

A sound struck on her ear as though it were in the room ; she turned sharply round. Through the window, open to the vault of heaven and to the path leading to the hotel, she saw Richard Kurt, and at that instant the sound stopped. He had been whistling. Now, silent and without looking up, he disappeared from her view as he made his way below her to the front of the house.

" And to think, besides everything else, you left that window open ! "

She flung the words at her mother ; it was past bearing.

To Mrs Colhouse's half-frightened " Do you think he saw you ? " she did not vouchsafe an answer.

He apologised for being unable to take her to the hotel in a cab ; none were available. At this she laughed. " Hacks in Manitou ! Now if you'd asked for a buggy—— "

" A buggy ! Of course. I'd not thought of that."

She was pinning a chiffon scarf round her hair.

" I'm glad you didn't. It would have blown me about more and it's only a few steps. Would you take these ? " Her manner was graciousness itself as she handed him her dancing slippers, daintily tied up with blue ribbon. He turned them over, fingering them. " I say, you have got small feet."

The wind blew pretty stiffly in their faces as they mounted the slight ascent. It went clean through her thin ball dress, over which she had thrown a light cashmere shawl, an old possession of her mother's. On almost any other occasion the discomfort of the walk, the feeling of disarrangement, would have put her on bad terms with herself, but this evening she battled on cheerfully and when he apologised for the breeze she said she enjoyed it.

They had passed through the crowded lobby together and stood at the entrance of the ballroom. She was enjoying the sensation their entrance had created. She knew she was the loveliest amongst the many pretty girls as she was the best dressed. She knew too that the arrival on the scene of Kurt was an event, not only because his clothes were noticeably well cut and his whole appearance elegant, nor was it because his hair was parted at the extreme left side of his head and brushed straight back in a fashion no man there would have ventured, even had he thought of it. What it was she did not exactly know, but perhaps it was his general Englishness that made him superior to the other men. And what pleased her still more was that the other men knew it and disliked him for it and that the girls knew it also and envied her. When he remarked : " I'm afraid we'll have to sit it out ; I can't dance like that," she muttered, half absently : " Like what ? " In her pleased absorption she had not grasped the meaning of his words and it was only when he added : " We don't reverse in England, you know," that her attention was roused. She knew that everything he did and said would be critically noticed, that their manner together was under scrutiny, but she did not waver. " We'll dance as you dance in England."

He stood with his arm extended, and she, taking two gliding steps, swung him into the midst of the dancers. He had an ear for time but no idea of dancing.

" Just swing with me," she whispered. " Let yourself go ; I'll steer."

He did as she told him. It was not a perfect success but it was near enough. They circled up and down. With every turn he improved ; before the waltz was finished he had got into the step.

" That'll do for now. Take me into the lobby."

" I say, you are a splendid dancer. I never could have got through without you." He looked at her, admiration in his eyes.

" I suppose I do dance well." Her tone was careless. " I like the way you hold me. Mind you always hold me like that. I hate that close way."

His way of holding was very effective ; if she could improve his step they would look perfect together.

" I know what you mean, but they do dance well, don't they ? In England men dance awfully badly. Most of them don't dance at all, and reversing's barred. At the hunt balls they stop you ; it's considered caddish to reverse, but that's because they go round and round like teetotums. They wouldn't bar it if they danced like you do here."

They danced together the whole evening. He got absorbed in the steps and improved each time. A few men came up and asked her for dances, but she declined coldly. Not a woman came near her, but he did not notice nor did he look at anyone.

He talked of nothing but dancing on their way back, and when they reached the cottage gate he hadn't finished what he wanted to say. She went in and turned up the lamp in the little hall while he stood watching her, uncertain whether to go at once or linger.

" Good-night." She held out her hand and he took it with reluctance. " I hate leaving you. May I come and see you to-morrow ? "

" It's two o'clock. To-morrow will be Wednesday, and you said you were going away."

" But I shan't. I shan't go until—— "

She waited for him to finish the sentence, smiling half-teasingly.

" You know what I mean," he faltered.

" Indeed I don't."

Taking refuge in action, he threw his cape across his shoulders and lighted a cigarette, then stood looking at her as though he wanted to say something but couldn't find the words. She was leaning with her back against the wooden mantelpiece ; the only light came from the flickering lamp in the hall, which, she noticed, smelt horribly. He turned abruptly and went to the open door, stopped again, came back into the room.

" When may I come—after lunch ? "

" You can come to lunch if you'll put up with it."

" How sweet of you. I should love to. Good-night."

She locked the front door and went slowly upstairs. She was tired, but she was not at all sleepy. What a boy he was —how different from any she had known! Was it wise to have asked him to a meal? When he saw how they lived, he might think less of her. Would he believe that though poor old mammy was very southern and provincial she was a lady? These were risks, but risks that had to be run; there was no time to lose. She lit the candles on her dressing-table, peering at herself in the glass, took up a hand mirror and had a good look at each side of her head and the back as well. She pulled her arms out of the wide sleeves and took another long look at herself. She stepped out of her dress and petticoat and stood an instant in her thin silk vest. The looking-glass upon the chest of drawers was too high to reflect her below the waist. She looked down intently at her legs, pulling the thin black silk stockings taut; she knew they were as nearly perfect in shape as legs could be. Then she slipped on her nightgown and blew out the candles.

V

Mrs Colhouse was a good cook, especially under Elinor's superintendence. The moment they heard the sound of Richard's footsteps on the path, the lake whitefish was put on the grill, the little round biscuits lay ready to place in the oven. The half-breed help looked on; she was never allowed to touch the food. Elinor had laid the table, had prepared the cucumber and tomato salad, which looked deliciously tempting in a dish shaped like a large green leaf. A glass vase full of Mrs Shuter's choicest rosebuds decorated the table, upon which lay a wooden bowl of baked potatoes, small glass saucers with delicately rolled pats of yellow butter snuggling crisply between their protecting lumps of ice, a little silver tray of salted almonds and one of chocolates. In front of each place was a half cantelupe, full of cracked ice.

A curtain made of light cane separated the dining-room from the sitting-room into which Kurt was shown clumsily by the help. He wore white flannel trousers and a tie more

vivid in colour mixture than Elinor had ever seen. The hideous combination of it fascinated her. She was very sensitive to colour, and she could not take her eyes off it as, parting the curtain, she came towards him. He must have noticed her stare, for directly after shaking hands with her he remarked: "I'm afraid you don't like my tie. It's only a sort of imitation of the Zingari, you know."

She didn't ask what Zingari were, but told him lunch was ready and took him into the other room. She sat down at once, but he stood beside her, waiting.

"What about Mrs Colhouse?"

"Mamma will come in presently. She insists on doing the cooking. We can't get cooks here and our old coloured cook's at Waterville." She watched his face, wondering how this humiliating avowal would affect him.

"I'm so sorry I'm giving her extra trouble. I wish I'd known. Can't I do something? I'm rather good at cooking. I began when I was a fag and polished it up in Canada."

Wondering what a fag was, Elinor made him sit down, assuring him that her mother would be upset if he took any notice. He praised everything; it all looked so appetising. And when she told him that she had had a hand in it, he expressed his admiration enthusiastically.

After the hired girl had brought the fish, Mrs Colhouse came in. Her face was flushed, and she glanced at Elinor apprehensively as Kurt rose and warmly greeted her, holding the chair for her and passing the sugar for her melon. But she wouldn't take any and it was only when Elinor pronounced the whitefish to be "lovely" that a look of relief came into her face. Things then went easily, and when Elinor, leaving the table and going out to the ice-chest, returned with a large glass bowl of sliced peaches and ice-cream, which she informed him she had herself prepared, she read in his face gratifying admiration of her taste and skill. She began to think that his admittance to their modestly conducted household, far from shocking him, had established an additional claim on his consideration. There was a perceptible deepening of his general interest, a growing sympathy in his manner towards both her mother and herself. He seemed to her to be

appreciating them the more for their making him so much at home. This was not in line with her experience ; any other man she could think of, though delighted to enjoy her society under such intimate conditions, would have become familiar on the strength of them. When Mrs Colhouse helped the hired girl to clear the plates, he begged her to allow him to do his share. " You don't know how much pleasure it would give me. I ought to wait on you." Her mother's answer " You'll get used to being waited on, time you've finished," was not at all the sort of answer she ought to have made and caused Elinor to take him into the other room and tell him that " Mamma would so much rather do it."

" I do like your mother," he said, " she's so kind ; but she looks rather sad, doesn't she ? "

Elinor was sitting in the low arm-chair, fanning herself : it was very hot. " I'm afraid she has reason for being sad." She sighed and put her fan before her eyes. This was a moment to take advantage of. " She's not happy with my father and we've lost all our money."

He sat down close to her at the end of the sofa. " I'm so sorry."

" We used to live in Baltimore. Father is a doctor and was quite well off then. When he lost his money, we went to Waterville ; and things have got worse and worse. And I'm an expense to him, but he adores me ; he'd give me everything if he could. When I was a child I was brought up like a little princess. Now he's old and he's taken to speculating with the little that is left." She folded her fan and turned her face away.

" I'm so sorry." He laid his hand lightly upon hers as it lay in her lap. " I'm so sorry," he repeated.

" Oh, well, it can't be helped." She made a movement as though she were shaking off a spectre. " I'm sure I don't know why I should worry you with all that."

" Worry me ! To think of my having talked to you about my affairs while all the time you were worried to death. To think of your being so good to me, giving me that delicious lunch and all that, when you're—you're—— " He got up and walked to the window, then came back. " If only I had

some money. That's what makes me so angry—the governor's got plenty."

Elinor laughed. " I don't see the connection."

" Why not ? What's the good of money if one can't help one's friends ? "

" But you hardly know us."

" I feel as if I'd known you for years. You know what I mean. Your mother is such a dear." He had barely said the words when Mrs Colhouse appeared, followed by the help, carrying a tray of steaming hot, delicious-smelling coffee.

" I say, what a treat. I know you've been making that. How naughty of you. At home my eldest sister always does it, except when there are people."

" How many sisters have you, Mr Kurt ? " Mrs Colhouse asked.

" Two. I wish you knew them and my mother." He paused and looked at Elinor. " Perhaps you will some day."

It was plain that he wanted them to know all about himself, and he told them a good deal that afternoon. Elinor knew her mother was puzzled by many of his expressions and allusions ; so was she, for that matter, but they needn't expose their ignorance. They were all things that could be learnt without giving oneself away if one had sense.

CHAPTER II

i

During the next few days, Elinor had misgivings. It was surprising what a long period twenty-four hours could be when one was anxiously hoping and waiting for a particular thing to happen. Not that the time passed slowly ; on the contrary, she grudged every hour which went by without bringing her nearer to her goal and asked herself whether she had made the best use of it, for it seemed to her that events were not taking the course they ought to take. Was there anything she had done or left undone which might have brought about a more favourable, a more pregnant and especially a more emotional situation ? For, up till now, in spite of outward appearances which might impress onlookers at the hotel and cottage residents, in spite of an entirely sympathetic manner towards her, Richard Kurt had made no declaration. And she got no support from her mother, who seemed to be unnaturally and unreasonably protecting him at her daughter's expense. It was as though her maternal instinct had been aroused by his artlessness and by what she imagined to be his defencelessness. He had spent each day with them ; this was the third since the dance, and Elinor was to take supper with him at the hotel, whither he had now gone to dress. There had been a thunderstorm, which had kept them in all the afternoon. He was apparently quite as pleased when her mother was present as when she and he were alone together. She went so far as to express ironical wonder that her mother didn't come and chaperone her at supper.

" Yes," Mrs Colhouse tartly replied, " I guess he needs a mother more than he does a wife." At which Elinor went up

to dress, determining, whatever happened, she would manage without her mother's assistance.

He arrived punctually at eight as arranged, but when she came into the room he got up, hardly looking at her, and continued begging her mother to come with them. "I can't see why you don't come. Your dress? You always look nice. And what on earth do clothes matter at that rotten hotel?"

This was not agreeable for Elinor, who had put on a specially smart New-York-inspired dinner-dress.

On the way up he told her he didn't quite like taking her alone. Was it really all right? Wouldn't people talk?

"If you're afraid to be seen with me you'd better say so and not take me." She stood still as she uttered the words. She was losing patience with him.

"I say! You know I don't mean that. It's entirely for your sake; please don't be offended." His manner was appealing and she relented, but she was not really appeased. It was galling that, unlike everyone else, he was unimpressed by her fashionable appearance. He seemed to take it for granted, for he only glanced at her now and then when he talked. On this occasion she knew she was at her best; everyone in the dining-room stared at them as they went to their table. He had stupidly chosen one in a corner, where she could least be seen. She couldn't resist commenting upon this with some asperity, and his "Less conspicuous. I thought you would prefer it" would have increased her irritation had not an imposing-looking man and a lady wearing a diamond necklace and diamond rings taken their seats at the next table. Kurt had his back to them, which was as well, for the man stared at her with marked admiration —in fact, kept his eyes on her nearly the whole time. He must be someone of importance, for towards the end of supper Hugh M'Alpin came over to their neighbours' table and shook hands with them, asking when they arrived. M'Alpin was the most important man in Manitou, and only went out of his way for people who were worth while.

"We came up in my private cyar from Detroit. I'm on my annual grand tour of the system. There's a conference

of the Inter-state Commission at Milwaukee and I'm goin' to get things straightened owt." He addressed himself to M'Alpin but his eyes were directed at Elinor. He now began conversing audibly with the lady beside him, mentioning their new " brown-stone front " at Cleveland and their cottage at Narragansett. As he rose from the table Kurt kept his back to their neighbours while he waited for Elinor to pass out.

They sat down in the lobby where hotel guests gathered after meals.

" You didn't see that man at the next table, did you ? " she could not resist asking.

" I heard him ; that was enough."

The subject of her question came out of the dining-room and she saw that he was making a bee-line towards them. To her surprise, he held out his hand to Kurt, who rose slowly and apparently touched it with the tips of his fingers as the other asked him, with his eyes on her : " How air yew, young feller ? Where's yer uncle ? "

" In London."

" Guess he'll sell the C.W. & M. Your folk can't make that system pay under the Inter-state regilations. Have a cigyar ? "

Kurt declined politely, but the other showed no intention of moving and still kept his eyes on her. " I gave yer uncle the combination but he warn't takin' any. He's too high-flown, he is, always talking about his shareholders. You've gat to learn shareholders what business is—that's what I tell him." After laying down the law pretty thoroughly for some minutes as to what Mr Theophilus Kurt's railroad policy ought and ought not to be, during which time Richard Kurt stood silent, he suddenly turned to Elinor and asked her pointedly whether she was staying at the hotel and how long for. Kurt interrupted : " Miss Colhouse is with her mother at their cottage, Mr Galton." His tone was icy but the other, with complete imperturbability, continued : " Is that so ? I know a Dr Colhouse—tried to float a mining proposition at Chicawgo some time back." He looked knowingly at her, and there stood Kurt, with his eyes in front of him, not saying a word. The embarrassing moment was relieved by

the appearance of the lady with the diamonds, to whom Mr Galton made a sign. As she came near them, he introduced her as his wife. Kurt offered his seat, bowed and moved away, much to Elinor's relief.

" Where did yer run into young Kurt ? Seems to be badly stuck on himself." Mr Galton blew a cloud of cigar smoke into her face as he asked the question.

Elinor disliked cigar smoke, but she smiled ingratiatingly. She must manage him so that he didn't say anything to the detriment of her father in front of Kurt.

" He's English, so English, you know." She mimicked the tag of the day playfully.

" That is so, and he's full of money. Theophilus Kurt's in the Alger firm and I guess this young dude's got a big interest in their deals. Anyway the baron thinks a lot of his president ; lets him run the show his own way."

Elinor was meditating this information when Mrs Galton, whose eyes had been fixed on her while her husband spoke, remarked : " Perhaps Miss Colhouse knows more about the Kurts than yew do, James. Do yew know Mrs Kurt, Miss Colhouse ? "

" No, Mrs Galton. I only met Mr Richard Kurt here this summer after his aunt had gone to England."

The lady glanced meaningly at her husband and Elinor, disposed at this critical stage to be apprehensive, wondered what the glance implied. The diamonds might provide an opportunity to propitiate.

" What lovely jewels you have, Mrs Galton."

The older woman lovingly fingered the ornament on her breast and, looking at Elinor's array of poor little pins affixed as was the fashion to her bodice, answered : " They're all presents from Mr Galton, Miss Colhouse."

Was that bedizened hag insinuating something ?

" I took that for granted, Mrs Galton," she said, smiling at the president with deliberate intent to charm. Even at the sacrifice of her own interests she could not resist the joy of an immediate score. On this occasion she succeeded so well that the glittering lady rose, tossing her head, and walked off.

Mr Galton manifested exuberant delight.

" You got the old woman there; you're a pert chick. Say "—he put his mouth very close to Elinor's ear—" what about that English dude?" He drew back somewhat and waited for her answer.

" I don't think I quite understand." She meant her reply to show that she was taking his question in good part but she put an extra refinement into her tone.

" Anyone can see he's stuck on you. If I put in a word or two, will yew keep a little corner of your heart for me?"

" Why, what would you do with it, Mr Galton?"

His small blue eyes seemed to look her through. " I guess your old dad would be mighty pleased. He's pretty down on his luck, ain't he?"

She must appeal to his pity. " It's very hard on my mother and me, Mr Galton. Sometimes I wonder what will happen to us." She spoke very sadly. " Of course, Mr Kurt doesn't know all this."

" Why should he? You jest marry him and you'll be O.K. And if I ken do anything any time, why, let me know." He pulled a big pocket-book stuffed with hundred-dollar bills out of his pocket and extracted a square card upon which were engraved in large letters:

JAMES W. GALTON,

President

CCC. & O. & Associated Railroads, Cleveland.

" Our home's on Euclid but you write to the office and mark it 'Private.' You never ken tell——"

In the distance Richard Kurt was hovering uncertainly. The railroad president stalked across the hall and placed his hand on the young Englishman's shoulders, talking as he had done to her, close to his ear.

Some minutes later, Kurt, blowing through his lips as though he wanted to blow away a disagreeable memory, threw himself into the chair beside her. " What a man! He told me your father was a great friend of his." His tone implied that he couldn't believe it.

She was rather puzzled as to what to say.

" My father, being a doctor, knows all sorts of people. He can't always pick and choose his acquaintances and Mr Galton's influential. He was very nice to me and told me to write to him if ever I wanted a friend."

Kurt looked horrified.

" He told you that, did he? Well, all I can say is—— " He didn't finish the sentence ; his expression of disgust spoke for him.

On their way down to the cottage he let fall a remark which she pondered later on when she went to bed and it kept her awake for a good time afterwards. " I can tell you this. I'd do anything rather than that you should fall into the hands of a man like that. His friendship ! I'd rather you had his hate." It had not the satisfactory precision of an avowal but it was the nearest thing to it. The question now was how far she could push her advantage. Should she or should she not make further use of Mr Galton ?

ii

The next morning Kurt did not turn up but sent a note, which began without the customary " Dear." Evidently he was not bold enough to address her as Elinor, which even in speaking he had never yet done. He had once told her he invented special names for people he liked, but so far he had not invented a special one for her.

" A line to say I shan't be coming to the cottage this afternoon. I've promised to play poker with some men here. But if I may I'll look in after supper.—R.K."

That was all and it wasn't encouraging. Her first impulse was to send a cold answer telling him not to trouble to come in the evening but she thought better of it and wrote instead :

" Shall expect you about nine. Hope you won't lose all your money."

Mrs Colhouse came into the room as she was handing her reply to the messenger. " He's not coming this afternoon, mammy ; he's playing poker."

" Is that so? I guess they know they've got a jay, poor lad."

Elinor was wearing a rather soiled dressing-gown ; her fringe was curled but not combed out, and she was feeling thoroughly irritable. She threw the note into the fireplace angrily and snapped out : " That's about as much as you care. You think more about him than you do of me. I hope they'll darned well skin him. He deserves—— "

A loud knock interrupted her. It was repeated peremptorily.

" Get back to the kitchen and tell that good-for-nothing slut to open the door. I believe it's a visitor."

Elinor had hardly dashed out of the room and up the stairs when she heard the heavy footsteps of the impatient arrival. She stood on the landing listening.

" Guess I'm speaking to Mrs Colhouse. Glad to make your acquaintance. My name's James W. Galton, President of the Three C's. & O. Met your daughter last evening. She's a mighty pretty girl."

Elinor felt mad. There was her mother in that old alpaca blouse and an apron, and her hair all anyhow. She hurriedly combed out her fringe and threw on the dainty blue *négligé* to which her mother had, by her direction, put the finishing touches while she was at the hotel the evening before. Of course she found him sitting in the broken chair ; equally of course, her mother was standing in front of him like a servant. " You've taken us by surprise, Mr Galton," she said, in her best manner and with her most highly polished accent.

" Thought I'd come without making any shakes about it, seeing I know the old man."

Mrs Colhouse looked startled, and at a sign from her daughter subsided into a chair, on the edge of which she sat stiffly, looking first at Elinor then at the visitor.

" Now I want you to look upon me as a friend of the family. I've got a proposal to make. I've got to git off to-morrow to Detroit. What do you say to coming in the cyar and bringing that young English feller with you. Yew can stay a day or two there. There's fine stores "—he looked Elinor up and

down admiringly—" and I'll see you have passes and sleepers back. What do you say? " He addressed himself to Mrs Colhouse, whose face showed more and more surprise as she realised that his invitation included her.

" Thank you, Mr Galton, but I couldn't go. Thank you very much." She looked at her daughter with a frightened expression.

Elinor was thinking quickly. What was his object? It couldn't be disinterested kindness. What ought she to do? Kurt would certainly not go and if she went without him she knew she would never see him again. And what use was Galton in comparison with the other?

" I'm afraid it's impossible, Mr Galton. My mother couldn't come, and of course I couldn't go without her."

He glanced at her doubtingly. " It's as you like," he said. " Folk sometimes like a trip, and I hoped your mother would come—as I know the doctor."

He got up and offered his hand to Mrs Colhouse.

" Glad to have made your acquaintance, ma'm. If there's anything I can do for you at any time, yew let me know. I've given my address to your daughter. Good-bye, Miss Colhouse, if you change your mind, you've only to come along with your young Englishman. We leave at nine-thirty."

Without more ado he strode out of the room and out of the house, slamming the door behind him.

Elinor knew that her mother was expecting at least a comment from her on the railroad president's abrupt arrival and departure, but she was in no mood to gratify her. She was feeling generally sore without exactly knowing why, except that everything was going wrong through no fault of hers.

Mrs Colhouse sighed deeply and moved slowly to the dining-table end of the room.

That was mammy all over, off to act the martyr in the kitchen as usual, a sickening habit. Elinor called her back.

" Can't you wait a moment? You act as though you couldn't keep out of that kitchen."

Mrs Colhouse felt for the black ribbon under the collar of her blouse and pulled a watch out of her bodice.

Elinor watched her resentfully. " You can spare yourself trying to tell me the time without your spectacles. I know you're going to say you must get dinner ready. It so happens that there's cold meat and baked potatoes, so you don't have to."

Her mother did not reply but sighed again and returned the watch.

" Mammy—— " Elinor intended her mother to know that she was exercising great self-restraint " how many times have I told you not to go to the door looking like that ? "

" What was I to do ? I hadn't time to think, and the help was upstairs sweeping. Besides—he walked in anyway."

" Yes, and if you'd have done as I've told you times over, you'd have been out of the road. But what's the use of my trying to make a decent appearance ? "

Elinor's despairing gesture elicited another sigh.

" I believe the best thing I can do is to go to Detroit with Galton." She hadn't the slightest intention of doing so ; she was only trying to goad her mother into an expression of disapproval. But she failed.

" After your New York doings, I don't think it much matters what you do."

" New York doings. What d'you mean ? "

Mrs Colhouse drew in her breath instead of sighing and closed her mouth firmly.

Elinor intended to have it out. " I insist on your telling me. Who's been gassing about my business ? Of course I know. Felton. Pshaw ! " She gave vent to a bitter half laugh. " He's a fine one to talk against me." She threw herself angrily back in her chair.

" Did I ever say it was Felton Crane ? " Mrs Colhouse asked in an irritatingly even voice.

" You know he's crazy with jealousy, he'd say anything. What did he say anyway ? I'm determined to know, and you can't fool me. It's him right enough."

" I'm not going to say anything more, Nell, I had enough of it last time."

"You hadn't any business to talk to him then and you've less now. What right has he got sticking his nose into my affairs ? "

" Have you treated him fair, Nell? Why don't you break it off with him? You don't want him, do you? He's no good anyway."

Elinor changed her tactics suddenly.

" What right have you got to say he's no good? He's a darned sight better than nothing."

Her mother looked bewildered.

" What d'you mean anyhow? If you want him, why don't you marry him? "

" You know perfectly well Felton hasn't a cent. And, besides, I don't mean to live in Waterville for the rest of my life, I'd rather be dead—nor in America either—unless it's New York."

" I thought——" Mrs Colhouse this time spoke with a certain emphasis " you'd done with New York but as you've never told me anything—— "

" What do you want me to tell? You know Hilyard can't marry me yet. I've told you that and I'm not waiting on him. It's Richard Kurt I'm thinking about."

" But he hasn't even come to-day. You can see that boy's not thinking of marrying."

For an instant Elinor faltered, but she put confidence into her tone as she answered: " That's what you think. He's coming here this evening after supper. I want you to tell him about the president's asking me to go to Detroit."

" What good will that do? "

" Mammy! Can't you see Mr Galton's crazy to get hold of me. He only asked Kurt because he thinks he's a young sucker. You tell him that."

The look of resignation returned to Mrs Colhouse's face.

" I'll tell him, and if ever you marry him you'll be mighty lucky, I reckon."

iii

Elinor was well aware of the power of dress to enhance an appearance and she knew that no woman could make better use of it than she. In spite of Kurt's apparent indifference to her best effects, she simply couldn't believe that he was

as unappreciative as he seemed to be. As likely as not it was only part of his shyness, or it might very well be that in England it was not considered good style to make flattering personal remarks.

She had decided that on this occasion she was going to look pale and sad. She therefore used with discrimination the liquid powder, avoided lipsalve and selected a loose-fitting teagown of black *crêpe de Chine* which, if properly supported by the complexion and the coiffure, would lend her that air of wan dignity she had so often admired on the stage. And after all, was not life a stage and were we not all players ?

Thinking thus, looking at her dress as it lay on the bed and bearing in mind that it might fall open while she reclined, as she had decided, on the sofa, she selected a diaphanous golden-coloured petticoat ; she would wear no corset, only her gossamer chemise beneath. She had arranged the little sitting-room carefully before going up to dress, had moved the sofa against the wall with the green-shaded lamp casting its effulgence upon the middle and end of it but throwing a subdued and agreeably melodramatic light upon the part where her head would lie. She had placed the better of the two arm-chairs beside it with its back to the green lamp, and had told her mother to sit in the broken-springed one on the other side of the fireplace. She had also brought out two special cushions, a black and gold and a crimson one, to place under her head and behind her back. The only other light was in the corner beside the door which would enable her to be seen as she came in but the high part of the sofa and the pillow would screen her head from it when she reclined.

She did not hurry over her dressing, leaving the finishing touches till he entered the house ; this was just as well, for it was nearly half-past nine when she heard footsteps outside. She had even begun to feel anxious and was relieved when his voice confirmed his arrival. Her entry threatened to be a failure for so deeply interested did he seem to be in something her mother was saying that she had to stand some seconds in the doorway before he came towards her. Facing the light as he was she noticed that his hair was less smooth than usual and that he was flushed ; his manner, too, was excited

and wasn't he a trifle unsteady on his feet? Elinor was something of an expert in detecting such signs from a considerable experience of Dr Colhouse. As she sank languidly back on her cushions his face showed concern.

"I hope you aren't ill?" he asked.

"Only one of my nervous headaches, don't pay any attention to that. How did you come out from your game?"

"Never mind about that rotten game. Your mother's been telling me——" he looked round, evidently intending Mrs Colhouse to hear, but she had noiselessly left the room, "about that damned Galton." He spoke furiously.

This anger was exactly what she wanted. She put one arm beside her head and rested her lovely face on it, and with the other hand touched his arm lightly and soothingly. "Don't be so cross——" and then, very softly, "dear."

He jumped up with an excited flourish of his hand. "Cross! Don't you see what that blackguard is after? He thinks I'm an utter fool he can humbug as he pleases. What he wants is to—is to——"

She knew that he was unable to express with appropriate respect for her the president's evil designs. She closed her eyes an instant. "I'm not in a very happy position with no father to protect me; and mamma's so unsuspecting. Do you really think a man of Mr Galton's age and position would——"

"That scoundrel would do anything. He thinks because he's rich and he's got a rotten private car that he can do what he pleases. I know the sort of man he is! You don't. How should you? I say——" he came over and stood looking down at her "promise me you'll have nothing to do with him. He's sure to try every dodge—and I may not even know——"

She put her hand on his arm and pressed it. "Sit down, Richard. May I call you that?"

He seized her hand and pressed it between both of his. "May you? I love it." He raised her hand to his lips, holding it there.

She could feel the heat of his lips, an unnatural heat and as he just breathed a kiss upon her fingers she withdrew them

slowly, touching his face as she did so. It was very hot. His eyes travelled down her figure, rose to her face again ; they were very bright ; the light from the corner of the door shone full on his face, he was breathing hard. Neither said a word, only looked into each other's eyes. Her breast rose and fell without her volition. It was a tense moment but she must preserve her detachment ; that was vital. Suddenly he bent down and kissed her on the cheek.

" Richard ! Richard ! "

He drew back ; she knew he was half frightened at his act.

" Please forgive me, Elinor." Again he seized her hand, kissing it and murmuring : " I couldn't help it, I really couldn't. You look so lovely and you're so defenceless and the thought of that blackguard—— "

Elinor played a trump. She drew her hand away from his mouth and taking one of his, kissed it and held it to her breast. But he pulled it away, saying : " How can you kiss my hand ? It's yours, it's yours I must kiss—— " and brought hers passionately to his lips again. She half rose and with the other arm encircled his neck, and as she fell back she bore him with her, down and down. He buried his face in her breast, fell forward from his chair, his knee against the sofa, and ever she held his neck with her arm as he ruffled her more with every movement. His lips were upon hers now, stayed there. His hand touched her breast, followed her form, withdrew in fear, dared again, remained. Elinor had not experienced this performance unmoved and when palpitating, unmanned, ashamed, he stood away, regarding her as though she had become his handiwork, with a seemly and self-protective instinct she covered her face with her hands.

" Elinor, dear Elinor—— " his voice was muffled in sobbing gasps ; he threw himself on his knees beside her, " I love you ! I love you ! You belong to me now, you belong to me, don't you ? "

Very slowly she removed her hands and gazed softly at him. At last, with all the tenderness she could put into her tone, she murmured, " Nothing matters from now on. I love you, Richard."

He smothered her mouth with kisses. "Darling—darling —darling" was the only word he could find.

Now she gave herself up to him with complete self-abandonment. Her black *crêpe de Chine* could go to the devil for all she cared. Yes! and her Valenciennes-trimmed chemise too! What did anything matter now? He behaved desperately for several minutes, until, in fact, she was really beginning to feel the wear and tear. He ceased rather suddenly, and stood up, rocking a little.

Elinor was composing herself; her skill enabled her to accomplish such details as straightening her dress and arranging her hair without the absurd and grating awkwardness which must, she knew, generally be displayed on such occasions. Without having had an exactly similar experience previously, the episode was not entirely unfamiliar.

"Dearest——" he leant over her and kissed her "I'll never do it again. I feel as big a beast as Galton. What can I do to make up for it?"

She had put her feet to the floor but still reclined against the pretty cushions with an air of exhaustion; he was beside her now, holding her hand between both of his and looking at her anxiously. For a moment thus, then, with a quick impulsive movement, she sat up straight and put her other hand on the back of his and with quivering earnestness in her voice as she gazed intently into his eyes: "Only one thing, Richard. You must tell mamma at once we're engaged. I feel she'll suspect something, this house is a sounding board; one hears every word." She kept her eyes fixed on him, waiting for his answer. It was a critical moment.

For an instant he hesitated, as though he were making an effort to collect himself and to think; then he kissed her gently. "Engaged! We are engaged, aren't we? Of course I'll tell your mother at once. When? To-morrow? But—what will she say? Won't she think it rather sudden?"

"Mamma likes you so much she'll accept it at once. She may be a little surprised at first but I know it will make her happy. Come to-morrow morning. Now you'd better go." She got up, holding his arm. They moved out of the room

together and he put his arms round her once more. The front door was open and they were in the full light of the hall lamp but what did that matter now?

"Once more, darling." Again he kissed her and as he went down the path she saw he was trying to walk backwards to see the last of her, but he was too unsteady and had to give it up.

Without an instant's delay, Elinor locked the door, put out the lights and ran up to her mother's room. Mrs Colhouse was sitting by a table with a lamp on it, sewing a trimming on to one of her daughter's blouses. She looked up with a surprised expression as Elinor entered and bestowed a resounding kiss on her mother's cheek.

"He's asked me to marry him, mammy, and he's going to announce our engagement to you to-morrow."

Mrs Colhouse put down her work and took off her spectacles. "It's going to be marriage this time then?"

Elinor was in too exalted a state to let anything annoy her. "It certainly is, and what's more,——but never mind." She had been about to add: "I intend to marry him the very first moment I can," but she wasn't taking any chances; her mother might blurt it out to him and that was the last thing she wanted.

"There's many a slip, Nell. And what will his mother say?"

Elinor smiled. "If his mother don't like it, she'll have to lump it. It's her funeral, not mine."

iv

Elinor was under no illusions regarding her hold on Richard, but she was determined to lose no sleep over it and to husband her physical as well as her moral resources. When, on awaking to consciousness after eight good hours of refreshing and invigorating sleep, she slipped out of bed and into the faded blue dressing-gown, that old and trusty friend reminded her rather unkindly of other mornings disappointing in the fulfilment of overnight pledges. But she kept a confident

countenance to her mother who scrutinised her closely as they sat in the kitchen taking their morning coffee, and in spite of inward twitchings, Elinor put away a good round of griddle cakes and maple syrup, bestowing praise on her mother as she did so.

"Nobody's cakes are like yours, mammy."

Mrs Colhouse accepted the compliment joylessly. "What I want to know is what you want for dinner."

"Lunch, you mean. Grilled chicken, green peas and little new sweet potatoes. I've got some bars of Caillard's chocolate, and if that creature will get the cream I'll make a *soufflé*."

Then she went into the other room and settled down in the rocking-chair to think. No one knew better what morning reactions could mean. She pictured Richard Kurt waking in his room at the hotel and asking himself what he had really done and said the previous evening. She knew but too well the slenderness of the thread by which she held him. Would the thread hold? Would he come that morning and tell her mother? How far would he believe he was committed? This separation was dangerous; one never knew what a man would do once he was out of your sight. But he wasn't a man, and he was English with English ideas about the helplessness of girls and honour. He'd gone pretty far, his passion had got hold of him, he was wild for her—last night. Even after he had told mammy she wouldn't have got him until they were safely married. But what mattered was that he should come now.

With knit brows and thoughtful mien Elinor went up to her room to dress. This morning she meant to be fresh and flower-like. She came to the conclusion that she could not do better than wear the blue dimity, but she selected a different sash and she did her hair like Mrs Langtry with a coil in the nape of the neck.

CHAPTER III

i

It was a glorious day. Water and sky were blue as they sat under an awning, steaming up the Straits. Elinor was charmingly dressed in a tailor suit and a neat toque ; he wore a well-cut blue serge suit and a blue tie with white spots : their small valises lay beside them. Everybody looked at them admiringly, so far all had gone well.

The trip was Elinor's arrangement. They were to join her friends the O'Haras at a place called St Mary's at the head of the Straits and spend a couple of days there. It was to be a little junket before he returned, as return he must, to his work, which seemed to be much on his mind now they were engaged. Dennis O'Hara was a journalist and had married Elinor's only intimate friend, Julia Bendixon. She didn't tell her everything, but she told her as much as she wanted to tell, and in her own way.

Richard had been difficult at first, had asked for some unnecessary explanations and had shown needless concern about her being adequately chaperoned. He had also been apprehensive as to what Mrs Colhouse would think of their going off for two or three days in this unexpected way. It had been agreed that the engagement must be kept secret until Uncle Theo came back in September. He had always got on with Uncle Theo, and Aunt Kate was American. If he wrote to his father or mother they wouldn't understand and she couldn't imagine how angry they would be. That couldn't be thought of, but when Uncle Theo and Aunt Katie saw how sweet and charming and pretty she was, they'd write to his parents and put it all right. Meanwhile, he'd go back to Cliftonburg and work for her sake.

Elinor had let him talk but she kept her own counsel. The trip up the Straits was indispensable but it had not been easy to bring about. As late as the previous evening he had spoken seriously to her mother about their engagement and told her that he ought to go back to Cliftonburg at once. Even that very morning when he arrived at the cottage with his bag to take her to the boat, he had expressed his doubts again. " Really, do you think it's wise to go for this trip? I've a sort of feeling against it."

But here they were, safely on the boat, and for the moment at least he was in high spirits. His moods changed suddenly. At moments a preoccupied look came into his face and if she spoke to him, he started and replied absently, even coldly. She did not attempt to analyse her feelings towards him ; his manner, his appearance, his voice were factors just as much as the material advantages she was certain to obtain if she married him. She was shocked, though, at his off-hand, familiar way of treating inferiors. He spoke jestingly to the purser and even chaffed the coloured stewards in the dining-saloon so that they grinned all over their faces whenever he spoke to them. While he was thus carrying on, she ruminated. She would have to talk to him seriously before they got to St Mary's. How was she to begin? The one thing quite defined in her mind was that they must be married at once. She could count on the assistance of the O'Haras. Dennis was as cute as they make them, but she would infinitely prefer to run the show herself. Going up on deck, after the meal, she made some allusion to his behaviour at table, showing him she did not like it. He began by laughing it off but his face became grave when she said that it cheapened her. What did he think they would take her for? And he answered: " I'm awfully sorry if it annoyed you, dear. I get a sort of reckless mood sometimes. You see, all this has been rather exciting, hasn't it? "

" I don't see why that should make you give a Barnum show."

He looked away from her into the distance and lighting a cigarette, threw the match over the side. " Oh, it's an in for a penny, in for a pound feeling. Perhaps you can't under-

stand what I mean. You see, you haven't known me long." He seemed to be waiting for her to say something.

It might be a moment for sweetness, but she couldn't summon it. He ought to show more consideration for her.

" When a girl has given her life into a man's hands—— " her face became earnest, her voice trembled " when she has given him all she has to give, she can't help caring about every word he says, everything he does."

As she said the words his expression changed. He threw away his cigarette, and taking her gloved hand, held it between both of his browned ones.

" My dear little girl, I am so sorry. I had no intention on earth—I had no idea I was hurting you. What can I do? Tell me, what can I do? "

Elinor sighed and looked beyond him. The dark lashes drooped over her large brown eyes which slowly filled with tears. His words had touched her, for indeed she was at his mercy, at the mercy of the world—beautiful but alone. She drew a tiny perfumed handkerchief edged with Valenciennes from her pocket and passed it across her eyes. He continued to press her hand, begged her to forgive him, to tell him what he could do to comfort her.

" You are a man, Richard. You can't understand what a girl feels at a time like this when everything, her whole life depends upon one man. What is to become of me if—if—— "

" Dear little girl—darling—if what—if what? " His utterance was spasmodic; he was certainly moved.

" Richard dear, supposing you go off and leave me now. Supposing, for one reason or another, for your mother's sake or because you think it wiser—with the best intentions—supposing you go off to England. Supposing I never see you again after we get back to Manitou. You leave me there with poor old mammy and you go. What could I do? What would become of me? "

" Elinor! My darling! I should be an utter blackguard to do such a thing. Surely you can't imagine it. We're engaged—nothing could make me go back on that. Besides—I love you. I want you for my own wife." He looked

round ; a burly negro was coiling a rope a few feet away. " I wish I could kiss you, darling," and he pressed her hand hard between his.

Elinor sighed again softly but deeply, she could not be comforted. Again she looked away into the distance under the deep lashes ; again the far-away, sad look came into the deep brown eyes. And he sat mutely watching her.

" Ah, Richard dear. Life is so hard for a girl who is alone. If only—if—— " She pressed his hand. He must see she was too much under the influence of emotion to go on.

" Yes ? Yes ? "

She made an effort, swallowed the sob in her throat, mastered herself. " If I belonged to you legally as—as " —she looked round. The negro, seeing there was no fun to be got out of watching them, had disappeared " as I do the other way, and if we could only be married, I wouldn't mind anything. I'd wait years if necessary." She had been supporting her head with her elbow on the taffrail as she gazed sadly into the lake but she turned suddenly towards him and placed both hands in his. " Richard, can't we get married—now—at once ? Will you, Richard ? " She looked intently into his face. His eyes were averted. A moment passed.

" Elinor dear, I want to do everything you wish. But if I marry you without my parents' consent, the governor will cut me off. We can't live on nothing, can we ? "

" But they needn't know. We'll keep it secret from everyone but mamma. I should have to tell her—after—after what has taken place."

He relaxed his hold on her hand and she withdrew it as he moved uneasily in his chair. " But, Elinor, I couldn't marry without at least seeing my people and explaining."

There was a ring of horror in her voice as she answered : " Then you *do* mean to go to England before we're married. Oh, Richard, Richard—— " She buried her face in her hands.

Greatly distressed, he tried to comfort her. " What can I do ? What can I do ? "

" How can—can you ask ? " She managed to bring the words out between her shaking sobs.

There ensued a longish pause, punctuated by the sound of her weeping, which she kept within close audibility.

At last he spoke. " Elinor, dear Elinor, it shall be as you wish, but—— "

She continued to sob ; her whole body was quivering.

" But," he went on, " if it comes out, if the governor hears of it, if he disowns me, you mustn't blame me. If you're ready to take the rough with the smooth and chance it, I am. Now " he put his hand gently on her shoulder " now, darling, do stop crying."

With a great effort, she stifled her sobs, raised her head, whispered " Dearest Richard, thank you, thank you, thank you "—and turning her back to him and the boat, she put her toque straight.

ii

The O'Haras were awaiting them on the landing-stage with expectant curiosity ; in fact Dennis stared at Richard as though his globular blue eyes were about to pop out of his head. Elinor had never realised how badly he dressed ; his hard felt hat was the wrong shape, and his waistcoat, cut much too low, displayed an unbecoming amount of decorative shirt front. She glanced at Richard with apprehension ; the impression made on him by Dennis at this juncture might be of importance. He did not, however, seem to notice these defects, and when, after reciprocal introductions, Julia took her arm and they walked on to the hotel which was within a hundred yards or so of the quay, the two men appeared to " cotton " to each other. To Julia's " Say, Nell, you have been smart," Elinor replied by a warning look and a whispered " This isn't the time to gas, Juley." Juley responded with an understanding wink and Elinor, turning round, made a remark to Richard in order to bring the two men level with them so that they could all walk together. She had no confidence in Dennis's discretion, and he might ask undesirable questions or make unsuitable remarks.

Richard luckily refused Dennis's invitation to a cocktail and went to his room while Elinor was accompanied to hers by

Julia, who, as the door closed behind them, exclaimed : " My dear, I didn't know what to do about the rooms."

Elinor laid her toque carefully on the bed, which was a double one, and with an expression of shocked surprise asked her what she meant.

" How was I to guess, Nell? But anyway, is it going right? " There was a certain anxiety in her voice.

Elinor had already taken a hand mirror and some other small objects from the top of her valise and laid them on the toilet table and was taking a side view of herself. She put the mirror down and turned round to her little eager friend, whose head only reached to her shoulder. " We're going to be married at once, Juley, and you and Dennis must help me. Will you? "

" Will we? You bet we will. But tell me quick, quick, what you want us to do."

Elinor put her hand to her forehead and thought a moment. " Could you get hold of Dennis? " she asked.

" Now, you mean, before we've talked? " Julia's tone was disappointed.

" Yes, dear, now. Every minute's of importance. Get him. I'll explain while he's coming."

" He's in the bar, I reckon. We'll send a bell boy."

Elinor opened her carefully packed valise. One side of it she left strapped as it was ; that side was not wanted yet.

" Go on, Nell ; do go on," Julia cried impatiently.

Elinor undid her sponge-bag and using her tooth-brush as though it were a lecturer's wand, she pointed at the door. " Richard Kurt, son of William Kurt of London, nephew of Theophilus Kurt, President of the C.W. & M. Railway system. He's rich or will be—his father is and he's in the best society. I don't know who his mother was but she certainly belongs to the aristocracy. Without exactly letting on as to what she was, he gave me to understand that she's away up out there. They've got a London house and one in the country, horses, carriages and footmen, and all London goes to their house and—— " Julia was hanging on her words breathlessly when Dennis entered the room, grinned at them both

and, throwing himself on the bed, lay there with his hands under his head.

Elinor waved the tooth-brush at him. "Get off there with your dirty shoes."

"Dirty shoes," he repeated, bending his legs back and examining first one, then the other. "They're brand new patent, four dollars and fifty cents second-hand at Ikey Moss's in your own fashionable boulevard. You're a peach Nell, a real peach." He jumped off the bed, and going up to Elinor, kissed her on the neck.

She pulled away from him.

"Juley, do make him behave. This is no time for fooling."

"No, be serious, Dennis; Nell wants you to do something for her."

"Dennis," Elinor put her hand on his shoulder, at which he wriggled as though she were tickling him, winked and put out his tongue. "Dennis," she repeated, paying no attention, "we want to be married at once. Will you help me?"

"That depends." The sprightly young Irishman disengaged himself and put his hands in his pockets. "If you want a sample, I'm your lad."

"Sample, what does he mean?" Elinor asked Julia despairingly.

"I mean, if you want to take a chance with me first——," he looked meaningly at the bed.

"Oh, dry up, Dennis, can't you see she's in earnest?" Juley's tone made an impression; his face changed and he waited.

"Dennis, will you go, now—before supper—and find out where we can get married to-morrow and what's got to be done? In fact, will you play brother and see me through?"

Elinor again put her hand on his shoulder, her voice was full of emotion. She was in earnest now; his help might be indispensable and she put all the dramatic quality she could command into her expression. For a second the Irishman looked at her admiringly without speaking. Of a sudden he threw his arms round her and, placing his hands below the small of her back, pressed her close to him, released her and

seized his hat. " I will," he said, and bolted out of the room Elinor turned sharply to her friend.

" Watch him out," she exclaimed ; " see he don't meet Kurt—quick."

The little woman swiftly followed her husband down the passage and Elinor went on with her toilet.

She found Richard downstairs waiting for her. She noticed that, like herself, he had the knack of making a new appearance by the substitution of one or two details of dress for others. Some people did not attach importance to such matters ; she did.

" I like that Irish chap, he's an awfully good sort."

" Yes, they are real friends of mine. What I like about them is their loyalty ; they'd do anything for me."

" She is tiny, isn't she ? She's got a funny little face, almost ugly, but she's so sharp that it doesn't matter."

As he spoke Dennis and Julia appeared in the distance, the former waving a paper. Luckily Richard had his back to them, and Elinor, interposing herself skilfully, seized it from his hand.

" Not a word now, Den," she whispered, holding her finger to her mouth.

The Irishman threw himself into a chair beside Richard. " I've got a thirst I wouldn't sell. By St Patrick, what I've done this evening's worth a bottle of wine." To which hint Richard responded by ordering a bottle of champagne to be put on ice as soon as they took their seats at the supper-table.

Pleased though Elinor was at Richard's ready liberality, she glanced apprehensively at Julia. If Dennis's tongue became much looser he might utter some indiscretion that would wreck everything even at this eleventh hour. It was nervous work getting through the meal ; she had to listen to every word, be constantly alert, ready at the first sign of danger to take whatever measure was necessary. There were moments of menace. When Dennis lifted his glass and drank " success to crime including the sacrament of marriage," she shot an apprehensive glance at Richard. He was talking very little, his glass stood beside his plate almost untouched.

He had ordered coffee and liqueurs to be brought to the table, Dennis had quieted down and conversation was languishing. But hardly had the Irishman tossed off his glass of brandy than he leant across the table and seizing Richard's, swallowed that as well. Banging down the empty glass with such force as to smash the base of it, he pointed his finger at Richard and remarked: "Not to-night, my lad. Brandy is a highly exciting stimulant suitable at this time of night for married men only"—with a huge wink at Elinor, "you might get loose and do some damage before the curtain goes up, and I'm here to see all's square till the knot's tied to-morrow. Isn't that so, Nell?"

There was an awkward pause. Elinor's eyes were on Richard, what could he think now? Could his innocence survive the shock of this last performance? She cursed herself for bringing Dennis into her counsels, she had been crazy to do it. And yet from Richard's appearance he might even not have heard. There was only one thing to do. Signing to him, she rose from the table and they walked out of the room together.

iii

"I am so sorry Dennis behaved like that," she laid her hand on his arm; they were standing near the entrance to the hotel, the door open to the evening air.

"I really didn't catch what he said, I was rather absent-minded at supper, I'm afraid. I've been thinking, there's something I must say to you; let's go out into the fresh air."

Fear laid its cold hand on Elinor's heart. His voice sounded distant, as she had not yet heard it. What was he going to say? Whatever it was, his mind was made up. She knew that intuitively, the boyish look had died out of his face, his mouth was tightly closed. Yes, his mind was made up, she would never be able to change it now. But to what? Somewhere between her breast and her stomach she felt a spasm which was physical anguish, the anguish of suspense. She tried to choke the horrid sensation down.

They strolled slowly by the side of the channel. Its waters raced here into rapids, across which a light suspension bridge swung its fragile length to the Canadian shore opposite. Richard guided her to it. Half-way across he stopped and let her arm fall, turning as he did so and gazing over the parapet at the turbulent stream below. It was a clear moonlight night and very still. His face looked deadly pale, was that only the effect of the moonrays? His silence, as he stood there, leaning over the bridge, looking at the water, frightened her. What was he thinking? What was he going to say? Suddenly he turned round again and faced her. He seemed to be making an effort to master himself, to fight something down. For yet more instants he kept his eyes on her without speaking. She felt herself shrinking from his eyes. If only the moon weren't so bright!

"Elinor, you are going to be my wife, that is settled. I have given you my word, there can be no going back on it. But I tell you straight, I must tell you, that I know it is an awful mistake." He paused. Did he expect her to speak? No, for when she began to try and stammer something, he held up his hand. "If I can get someone to marry us to-morrow, I shall do so. I know I'm too young to marry, I'm not ready for it. I want to say this to you now so that in the future, if you regret it, I can never feel I didn't warn you. But I'm going to do my best and I shall stand by you through thick and thin if you back me up. I hope all will come right in the end. We shall have to separate at once afterwards, of course. If my people knew I had got married like this without a word to them, they'd never forgive me. We may have to live apart for some time. I may even have to go to England without you. But I'll stick to you as long as you stick to me." Again he paused. Ought she to speak? "That's about all, I think, except—I'd like to marry you under the British flag." He pointed to the far shore. "It's only over there, and—I should feel I was doing the right thing if we were married in church. I'm—I'm not religious, you know, but it's the decent thing, I've been brought up to it and I don't trust the American marriage laws. I mean you to be my wife properly. I've finished now."

He turned round and leant over the bridge again.

That helped her, the scrutiny of his eyes was unbearable. While he looked at her she could not think, she could not even realise her immense, her overwhelming relief. He was going to marry her as soon as he could, of his own accord, without her even having to press him. What had made him change like that? She was safe, everything was all right now, to-morrow or the next day she would be his wife, Mrs Richard Kurt, daughter-in-law of his father and mother in London. She must say something now, how was she to put it? He turned towards her again and this time he put his arm round her, and she, throwing back her head under the moon, lifted her face towards his, lifted her lovely face with its perfect shaped nose, with its great moist eyes under their heavy lids, with its lips parted to show the glistening teeth, with its lips parted, inviting his. But his did not meet them. Instead he bent his head and kissed her just above her eyebrow, as a brother might. Had he no sense of romance? She had risen to the occasion so beautifully.

He offered her his arm quietly. "Now I think we'd better go back as I want that Irish chap to help me see to things."

Elinor brought him to a halt.

"Richard, will you do me a favour? Please don't ask the O'Haras to help you. Make the arrangements yourself. You don't need him and—I'd much rather they weren't mixed up in our affairs any more than they have to be. You see——" she noticed that he was looking curiously at her, "the only point was that they were here and could chaperone me. I should have preferred our being alone, much preferred it."

"But they are great friends of yours?"

What was that odd undertone in his voice? "Perhaps I've made you think they're greater friends than they really are."

"But you trust them, don't you?"

"Yes, I trust them, of course." How was she to get out of this creditably? "Richard!" she put her hand on his arm and looked into his face "this surely is our affair, I feel I want *you* to do it *all*, it will make me happier——."

" But you'll let them come and see the knot tied, won't you? "

Why did he use that expression of Dennis's? Had he heard? Was he deeper than she supposed? And if he was, if he knew or suspected, how could he be ready to marry her just the same? Anyway it was settled, she had nothing to fear. There was nothing to lose her self-possession about.

" Yes, of course, they can come. But Dennis sometimes says such—such vulgar things, and this evening I feel I can't bear any more; it's all a great strain on me. I can hardly realise even now that this may be my last evening as a girl. You understand, dear, don't you? "

He answered gently: " Yes, I understand. Of course it shall be as you like. You might tell me, though, what it is exactly you want me to do."

Why did his eyes sometimes make her feel so uncomfortable? She withdrew her own as she answered:

" I should like you to leave me with Julia and go off to bed. If there's anything Dennis can tell me about the—the formalities—I'll send word to you. If not, we can start in the morning early and find out."

He listened gravely and attentively. " I will do as you wish."

Once more he offered her his arm.

iv

To Elinor's disgust, as they entered the hotel, Dennis was holding forth to two men, who were roaring with laughter at something he was telling them. As soon as she and Richard came into view, all of them stopped laughing and stared. Apparently Richard had not noticed them and she guided him to the opposite end of the vestibule where Julia was sitting.

The little woman held up her finger. " Oh, you two! I've been looking all around the hotel for you."

Elinor cut her short. " Richard is tired and is going to bed."

Julia gazed at him through her pince-nez, with a dis-

appointed expression. " I mustn't ask any questions, must I? But I do so want to know what you've decided. I love my Nell, Mr Kurt."

" We're going to be married to-morrow if I can arrange it," he answered, in a low tone.

" Oh, I am glad. You're a lovely couple—and these run-away marriages are so romantic——."

Richard's expression changed. " We want to be married quietly, that's all. And it must be kept secret till I've had time to tell my family."

Mrs O'Hara grinned sympathetically and joyously. " Of course it must. We know that—don't we, Nell? "

Bidding them both good-night, he walked through the hall to the stairs, looking straight before him.

The sight of O'Hara had revived Elinor's anger. " I never could have thought Den would have behaved so mean. It's not his fault if I'm not let down. Only a man as much in love as Richard would put up with such talk as he gave us this evening."

Julia looked distressed. " He don't mean anything by it," she remarked, in a soothing tone.

" Don't mean anything ! He as good as told my fiancé I'd engaged him to rig up my marriage—with his disgusting expressions about ' seeing things square ' and ' getting the knot tied.' " Elinor flashed her eyes at her friend, who recoiled under the withering scorn of her voice. " A fat lot of good he's been to me. Look at him now. I'll bet he's giving us away to those loathsome drummers he's tagged on to. D'you realise what I've been through all this time, what I'm going through now? "

Julia cast despairing eyes at her husband. " What ken I do, Nell? " she asked.

" Go over there and tell that blabgut of a husband of yours to quit the trash he's with and come upstairs with you." Elinor marched furiously off and up the stairs to her room.

Five minutes later there was a knock on her door. Julia entered the room, followed by her husband.

" Say, Nell," Dennis went forward and stood in front of Elinor, " don't be so mad. There's no harm done."

" No harm done ! How do you know ? Instead of being a help, you've done all you could to down me. Nice friend you are." She burst into tears and little Julia ran to her and put her arms round her waist.

" You've acted the fool, Den, you always do when you're full," she cried, kissing Elinor on the neck, which was as high as she could reach.

O'Hara sat down on the bed, blew his nose loudly, folded his arms and stared at them with a blank expression. " When you two have finished, I'll begin."

Elinor continued to sob and Julia to console, without noticing him.

" What have I done anyway ? Nell telephones she and her beau are coming to St Mary's and wants us to stay over. We were going away but we waited to please her. She sends me to find out how she's to get married. As soon as I get back with the information she behaves as though she or both of us were crazy. We have supper, she and her young duck disappear. The next thing I'm told is that I'm a doggorned fool and a blabgut and that I've given the show away."

Elinor was still inconsolable and Julia got her into a chair and stood beside her. " Why don't you tell her what you've done, Dennis, instead of sitting there talking. Where's the paper ? "

" How do I know she wants it ? What do I know about anything ? "

The words were said in a mock despairing tone but his expression showed that he wanted to put matters right. He took a folded paper out of his pocket and spread it out on the bed.

" Come, Nell, dear. Do look at it," Julia urged coaxingly.

Holding her handkerchief to her face, Elinor moved slowly to the bed-side. It was a printed form which stated that, in lieu of banns, the marriage of the persons named thereon, for which blank spaces were provided, could be duly and legally solemnised in St Luke's Church, St Mary's, District of Algoma, by the incumbent of that benefice, on payment of seven dollars and twenty-five cents, plus a five-dollar stamp for the special licence.

This was, after all, exactly the information she wanted, and she could forgive him now.

" He likes you, Den." She spoke a little tearfully still. " He was going to ask you to help him, but I had to talk it over with you first. He wants to marry me at the earliest possible moment."

Dennis jumped up, put his arm round her neck and kissed her. " Give me a kiss, Nell, I've always told you you were a peach." He kissed her again. " Righteousness and peace have kissed each other but, as I was going to say, there's a mouse of a cleric who's making good money out of running his church as a registry office. All your boy's got to do is to go to the parsonage, pay that twelve dollars and fix the time for the ceremony."

The road was clear but she must still be careful. " Dennis, you'll say nothing to him about all this ? "

" For sure I won't."

" If he should ask you, say you know someone who got married there. There's no call to say more. Now, will you get me some paper and envelopes ? "

He left the room.

" It's all right now, Juley, but it mightn't have been. I want to have a talk when you've got Dennis to bed."

" That won't be before the bar's closed."

He came back with the paper and envelopes and Elinor was left alone. She sat on the bed and using the back of her hand-mirror for a writing-pad started a note.

" Richard my dearest."

She stopped and sucked her pencil. Couldn't she improve on that ? She began on another sheet.

" Richard my husband-to-be."

That was better ! But was it, though ? She wrote one after another :

" My own Richard."

" My dearest Richard."

" Richard my dearest."

" Richard my husband-to-be."

" Richard my dear one."

" Richard my beloved."

Each had its special significance. She read them over, considering carefully. Now she'd got it!

"Richard, my all but husband." That was at once original, appealing and true.

"Richard my all but Husband,—It can, it shall be, as you wish. We will be married under the British flag and in a British church. I know nothing about your marriage laws but I trust you utterly. Dennis knows of a dear little church on the other side; it's called St Luke's, some friends of his were married there. There is no difficulty, only a small fee to pay. I shall be waiting for you, ready dressed, at eight. Knock at my door and we'll go down together.

"I can't write what I feel, my heart is too full. I am thinking, thinking of all you mean to me, of our future. You know how deep my love for you is; I've proved that. I pray to God I may make you as good a wife as you deserve. Your

Elinor."

She read it over. It was wonderful how naturally the words came when one was deeply moved. She put the note in its envelope, addressed it and laid it on the dressing-table. It was only half-past ten and Julia would be there in a few minutes, the bars closed early in Wisconsin. She began undressing, thinking hard. There would be plenty to talk over with Julia; she was pretty cute. She laid her skirt and blouse carefully on a chair and took down her hair. It wasn't very long but it was thick, and black as jet. She combed it out and twisted it, holding it beside her face. She had much rather have been fair but how her hair showed up her skin and the natural colour in her cheeks; her skin was as smooth as velvet, the colour of rich cream. She sat down and examined herself with the hand mirror. Her nose certainly was beautiful, so were her ears, like little shells close against her head. It was a pity her hair was so stiff, it was difficult to get it to go properly in the nape of the neck, those short hairs were so tiresome and straight, and curling them made them worse. She laid the mirror down, undid her corset, threw it on the bed, sat in her chemise only and took the

mirror in her hand again. The line of her neck and shoulders was perfect. She let her chemise drop and slipped on her lacy nightdress, open low in front, with blue ribbons to fasten it, which she tied with quick skill into impeccable bows, flattening out the ends.

There was a knock at the door.

Elinor slipped into bed as Julia entered the room.

" I've just put Den to bed. He's as full as he ever can be."

" Juley, I've been doing some thinking, and I want you to listen and talk to Den to-morrow when he's sober. First, though, take this note to Richard's room and hand it to him with my love. Say there's no answer."

Julia sped off and in a moment was back.

" He hadn't started to undress. He was writing. I saw the paper covered with writing ; stacks of it."

" Um, I wonder who he's writing to."

" Why ? D'you think it matters ? "

Elinor was pondering. " Don't know that it does much —really. But, Juley, you know pretty well now how things are, don't you ? "

" In a way I do, but not exactly."

" Well, listen. He specially doesn't want the marriage known ; he's scared of his parents. Seems he and his father don't get on any too well. But it's his mother he thinks about chiefly."

Julia gazed at her through her glasses with an alert expression in her bright eyes. " What is he going to do ? "

" He says he'll go straight back to his work at Cliftonburg and act as though nothing had happened till his uncle comes back ; seems he's good friends with his uncle."

" What then ? "

" Then he'd tell his uncle he's engaged. He wouldn't dare say married. After that he didn't seem to know what would happen——."

" Why, Nell," Julia jumped up and stood in front of the bed with clasped hands, " that won't do. You might go on for years like that. Now look here. You get married and leave the rest to Dennis and me."

" Leave what rest ? Why don't you say ? '

Julia sat down on the bed again and put her hand affectionately on Elinor's arm under the short lace-trimmed sleeve.

" 'Cos I'm wanting to save you knowing anything. That marriage can't be kept secret, that's all there is about it."

Elinor interrupted. " Juley ! It's the one thing he wants."

" Can't help that. We've got to think of you."

" But I've promised. I said I could trust you and Dennis."

" Well, an' I guess you can. See here, Nell, you just go on promising, that don't cost anything. He'll be as pleased as you will before he's done, anyway. And if you was to do as he wants, you'd likely find yourself left so badly that you'd —— But it's no use talking about it. What I want to know is, has he got a roll to go on with ? "

" I don't know what he's got, not much anyway. But that don't matter. The old man can raise a few hundred dollars to get us to London."

" That's talking. You'll fix the old folk when you get there. Trust you for that. Say, Nell, what's he doing now ? "

" Got some job on his uncle's railroad in Cliftonburg, about a hundred dollars a month, I guess, from what he said. He says he can easily get two hundred in a short while. His father wants him to work. Later on he's got to go into his father's business, banking, in London. Juley, they're rolling in money, millions of it." Julia's eyes glistened responsively. " And he's been in Canada with Sir William Leicester Kartwright. He married Isolde Allones, who's in *Town Topics* every week. Sir William Kartwright's one of the way ups in London. Seems he and Richard's father formed a big company for farming and ranching in Canada and Richard was out there as his private secretary. The concern went wrong but it doesn't worry his father, though he must have lost stacks on it. Richard's uncle's a partner with a baron who's another big banker, and they own the C.W. & M. Railway system. I tell you, Juley, Richard Kurt's away up in G. I'll take chances about what he's got now. There'll

be plenty of good English money and everything else later on."

By this time Elinor had worked both herself and her friend up to an exhilarating state of excitement, and Julia bent over her and kissed her with enthusiasm.

"Good for you, Nell," she exclaimed, "now, I'll get back to Den. When's the wedding to be?"

"He's to call for me here at my room at eight. We'll have breakfast and go to the church straight away. You wait here till we come back."

"Right, Nell." She kissed her good-night. "Sweet dreams, my dear, and don't worry."

V

When Richard knocked on Elinor's door at the appointed hour next morning, he had thrown off his seriousness of the night before and appeared to be in buoyant spirits. She was not quite sure that she altogether liked his new mood. She had prepared herself to be grave if not solemn as the momentous hour approached. She even alluded to her sense of its gravity at breakfast, for which he had, to her mind, an unreasonable appetite and took longer over than in the circumstances was altogether becoming.

On their way across the suspension bridge he stopped at the spot where the scene of the previous evening had taken place, hung over the parapet and, looking at the water, said: "I must shoot those rapids this afternoon." Imagine thinking of such a thing when one was going to be married in perhaps an hour!

They had seen the minister get up from his breakfast through the open window as they approached the house. They were ushered into the parlour by an elderly woman, whose back was no sooner turned than Richard made allusions to her false hair. His behaviour was worse when the clergyman entered the room in a dignified manner, holding a prayer-book. Opening it at the page where lay a fringed canvas marker embroidered with a cross, the minister took out a

card, at which Richard barely glanced before passing it to her. While she was reading the inscription

THE REV. C. HAWKE,
Incumbent.
St. Luke's Vicarage,
St. Mary's, Ontario.

she heard him say : " I expect you know we've come to get married. How soon can we get it over and how much does it cost ? "

Elinor considered such a way of introducing the object of their visit most undignified, even vulgar, and she was surprised that the minister smiled so pleasantly while he opened the prayer-book near the cover and took out another and larger card. This one Richard examined carefully. " That's all right," he said, drawing a bundle of notes from his pocket and counting them on to the top of the prayer-book. " Five, ten, twenty. Let's see, how much was it, including the stamp ? " He pulled the card out of his pocket. " Ah, I see. We'll call it a round twenty, shall we ? "

Mr Hawke continued to smile. " Very kind, I'm sure, Mr ——. What did I understand to be your name ? "

" Richard Kurt and this is Miss Elinor Colhouse. We might as well fill in the forms now, if it's all the same to you."

Mr Hawke rubbed his hands softly. " I can marry you now if you like ; the church is quite close. Would you like me to see to it at once ? "

" Yes, Mr Hawke, I should."

" Excuse me then, a moment."

He left the door ajar. Elinor closed it and turned to Richard. She was feeling very sore. " I don't know why you have adopted this attitude."

" What attitude ? "

" You know perfectly well what I mean. I think it's very unkind. No girl likes a joke made of her marriage. And

your way of acting and talking is worse than a joke. You seem to want to hurt my feelings."

Just then Mr Hawke returned with some papers, a pen and an inkpot in his hands. Elinor passed her handkerchief over her eyes and at the clergyman's invitation seated herself at the table beside Richard to fill out the forms spread before them. Once more Mr Hawke returned to the prayer-book, took out a third card, of much smaller size, and remarked to Elinor, with a benignant look : " Marriage lines, the most important of all for you, young lady, but I can't part with it yet—not yet—but very soon." He turned to Richard. " We can proceed now if you like."

The lady who had shown them in was awaiting them at the front door and was now introduced as Mrs Hawke. " What a lovely day. Blessed is the bride that the sun shines on." Her smile was full of admiration and Elinor began to feel on better terms with herself.

Richard and the clergyman were walking in front, but they turned round and waited for the ladies to come up.

" I say, Elinor, Mr Hawke was speaking about witnesses and the O'Haras came into my head. I'd forgotten them. I'll run and fetch them."

She hesitated a moment. It would be a mistake to offend Dennis and Julia, but she wasn't going to let Richard go without her, she had heard of brides being left at the church before now.

" I'll go with you ; they'll like it better if I ask them myself."

On their way to the hotel she determined to get an explanation of his constant changes of mood, and obtained an admission that he had been " rather bad form." " But," he added, " I know that little humbug makes a living out of this game. You ask O'Hara."

She looked sharply up at him. What did he know ? His face betrayed nothing ; he was impenetrable sometimes.

They found the O'Haras awaiting them.

The clergyman, accompanied by Mrs Hawke, bustled out of the vestry in his surplice. " I'm quite ready. Would your friend like to act as best man ? "

O'Hara nodded.

" Please give him the ring, Mr Kurt."

" The ring. By Jove, I never thought of that ! " Richard looked helplessly at Elinor, who was thinking what a fool she had been not to have reminded him of the necessary symbol.

Dennis came to the rescue.

" I guess that's happened before now, hasn't it, your Reverence ? "

Mr Hawke fumbled under his much-crumpled surplice and drew out a silver ring with an expression in his face like little Jack Horner pulling out the plum. Dennis examined it solemnly.

The ceremony over and the register signed, Elinor's vigilant eye observed Mr Hawke take Dennis and Julia aside. She beckoned to the latter, who whispered : " They're bargaining about the ring. He asked five dollars and Den says it's worth fifty cents."

Richard had overheard. Slipping across the vestry he put some notes in the clergyman's hand : " I beg you to accept ten dollars, Mr Hawke. The ring will be a souvenir of the greatest event of my life and I shall always keep and cherish it."

Elinor's heart leaped. There was a gentleman indeed, a real English gentleman ; she took his hand and pressed it silently.

The Hawkes saw the four of them out by the vestry door.

Elinor was in front, with her arm in Richard's. " Let them pass," she whispered. There was so much she wanted to say, but she found no suitable words. She was actually married to the boy beside her, he was hers now by right. What ought to be her next step ?

They had almost reached the other end of the bridge when he broke in upon her thoughts.

" I say, Elinor, I must shoot those rapids after lunch."

She tried not to show she was put about but he certainly was unaccountable.

He seemed to take it for granted that she should go up to her room alone and she was obliged to leave him while Julia accompanied her upstairs. She would have loved to un-

burden herself to her friend who plied her with questions as to what he had said and done, but how could she admit to her that he had literally said nothing, had never offered even to kiss her and that the one thing he wanted to do was to shoot the rapids.

" Wasn't he sweet, Juley ? "

" Sweet. Anyone can see how happy he is. You are lucky, Nell dear." Julia kissed her warmly.

This was balm to Elinor.

The preliminary cocktails gave the ensuing meal a good send-off. Dennis behaved with reasonable decorum and to Elinor's relief no allusions were made to the morning's ceremony. Richard's spirits were maintained but his manner towards Julia and herself was identical. He was being pleasant all round.

When they rose from the table, he drew her to the corner of the hall. " I've looked up the boats. We must get off to-morrow at nine."

She assented, but there was more to come.

" It isn't possible to go on here like this. You mustn't be compromised. I must get you safe to Manitou with your mother and then go back to Cliftonburg."

She nodded.

" I'm so glad you think so ; everything depends now upon keeping it dark. I wrote a long letter to my mother last night, but I thought better of it. Letters are no good. I shall have to face it out when the time comes. But there's no hurry, is there ? "

" No, there's no hurry," she answered mechanically.

" Your agreeing with me makes everything easier. Now, let's go and shoot the rapids."

vi

It was quite exciting rushing through the boiling water. Jagged rocks, alternately exposed and overwhelmed, marked the narrow channel through which their canoe must pass.

The two Indians standing, one at the bow, the other at the stern, uttered loud shouts, and as an additional thrill the paddler in the stern, with great dexterity, dashed about a glassful of water over Richard's back. That was all. They shot into the calmer current and came smoothly to shore a mile lower down.

Richard paid the men laughingly, and said to her : " That's done ; rather jolly, wasn't it ? "

Further on, they took an ordinary rowing-boat and he rowed slowly into a backwater full of rushes. Here and there the water was almost stagnant and covered with water-lilies. Letting the boat glide to the bank, where it came to rest, he shipped his oars and sat down by her in the stern. At last ! He put his arm behind her and drew her towards him, kissing her on the cheek as he did so. She yielded herself freely to him, moving her face so that their lips met, and held his in a long kiss. Then he sat back in the seat, withdrew his arm and lighted a cigarette. For a moment his expression was troubled, he inhaled several mouthfuls of smoke, then began :

" There's a lot I want to say, Elinor."

" Yes, dear." She put all the expressiveness she could into her voice. She wanted him to talk.

" We're man and wife now. I don't think I quite know how it has come to that, somehow."

The remark was not flattering, was not at all what she would have liked him to say but she would not show that and she made no comment.

" But there it is and I think, when we are able to be married properly so that everyone can know it, it will be all right. As it is, you see, really, it's not a marriage at all " —he looked at her again—" not in the proper way, I mean."

What was he driving at ? What did his words imply ?

" Of course it's private, if you mean that," she answered.

" No, I don't mean only that. I mean we can't live together at all, we mustn't. It would be utterly wrong considering—considering the circumstances."

She recognised the lameness of his conclusion and she began to see light. He was conveying to her that he would not claim his rights as a husband. If he felt so, there was nothing

for her to do; this lack of ardour was humiliating but he would soon change when they came together again. Meanwhile she must put something into his head it was important he should keep there.

She took his hand and held it between hers.

"I understand how you feel, dear. I'm sure you're right. But the thought of our separation is very hard to bear, especially when I remember what we have been to each other."

He threw his cigarette into the water and watched it soak and gradually sink before he answered.

"That was a mad moment, Elinor. I don't forget it but I'm ashamed of it. It was all against my ideas. A man must respect his—— I'd rather not talk about it. But it's no use making matters worse, is it?"

What exactly did he mean by making matters worse? What should she say? It was indispensable that he should realise the sacrifice she had made, his obligation to her.

"I don't know what you mean by making matters worse. I regret nothing as I know you love me. If you didn't, I shouldn't care to live" into her voice came the note of pathos "there would be nothing to live for." She ended with a sigh, looking not at him but into the water.

"Elinor—dear. Don't talk like that. Of course I love you." He put his arms about her and kissed her on the neck, the face, the lips.

She sighed again softly. "I hope so, Richard. All our future depends on that. 'Man's love is like a restless wave, ever at rise and fall; the only love a woman craves, it must be all in all.'" She quoted the words of her favourite song which always moved her. And Richard showed that the apposite quotation was effective, so effective that it provoked renewed physical illustration of the enduring power of his love. The shadows lengthened on the water and they turned towards the shore when the mosquitoes became disagreeably inquisitive.

Elinor's memories of the evening that followed were not amongst those she ever wanted to preserve. Dennis O'Hara's

silly jokes offended her sense of the appropriate and smeared what would otherwise have been romantic and poignant hours with commonness. She bore his behaviour as well as she could, encouraging Richard to talk about his home-life, hoping that when the Irishman realised the social and financial eminence of her future situation, he would adopt a more respectful attitude.

" Where are your parents now ? " she asked.

" I really don't know exactly. The last letter I got from mother, she was in Scotland staying with a Lady Dodd, old friends of ours. She's awfully nice but I can't stand her husband. He came up to me once when I was riding in the Row and asked me what omnibus my horse came out of."

O'Hara roared. " Good for Dodd.

" Dodd, Dodd, diddledy Dodd,
Riddledy, diddledy Dodd."

Richard joined in the laughter but Elinor was irritated beyond measure. Not only was this vulgar facetiousness in vile taste but it interrupted an interesting conversation. When the laughter subsided she began again, slightly changing the subject. " They aren't at their country place, then ? "

" Oh no. Mother dislikes Elthorne now, we've given it up. It's too close to London : nothing but brick fields. The Fitz-Alans never go there now either. The old lord hates all the new people. I don't blame him."

Richard's accent was on the " I."

She didn't understand. " What new people ? "

" Oh, people like us who have bought houses about there. The Fitz-Alans have been there since the Conquest, you see."

Elinor was concerned about the Kurts being new people and in consequence hated by Lord Fitz-Alan. She would have loved to know more about that but this wasn't the moment. Again she changed the subject.

" Where are your sisters now ? "

" They go to school in Paris but they'll be joining mother at Dieppe for the holidays."

" Is Dieppe nice? '

" I've never been there. The girls like it; they play tennis and bathe, and mother drives a lot."

This was a subject to pursue. Elinor glanced at the O'Haras as she asked: " What does she drive? "

" Oh, she sends the phaeton and cobs over with the old coachman. She never lets him drive the cobs; his hands are bad enough with the carriage horses. You should see her pitch into him." He laughed at the recollection.

O'Hara's eyes were fixed with an amused expression on Richard. " What does she say? "

" Tells him she'll discharge him the next time he jabs at their mouths. Sometimes she taps him on the back with her parasol."

" I guess the old lady's got a temper."

Richard's expression changed; his eyes flashed.

" ' Old lady,' what do you mean? " He rapped the words out angrily.

O'Hara was taken unprepared. Nothing was further from his intention than to offend. " No harm meant, young feller."

Richard ceased talking from then on and Elinor made no further attempts to draw him out. The ebullition had surprised her. He had never shown temper before but this exhibition proved that he had got one, and it also proved that the subject of his mother was one which must be approached with caution. She had taken occasion before supper to impress upon Julia the importance of restraining Dennis from indiscreet allusions when bed-time came. And for once he " acted reasonable." Richard bade her good-night at her door as casually as he had Julia just before; he never attempted even to look into the room, let alone enter it, but walked quietly off down the corridor.

She undressed with mingled feelings, which became emotional when she began packing so as to be ready in good time for their early morning departure. The sight of the one side of the valise still untouched, with the straps fastened as when she had so carefully placed the contents there, brought tears to her eyes. " Poor little nightie," she said aloud, as she turned back the partition and extracted the dainty thing,

so exquisitely beribboned and scented. She laid it reverently on the bed and unwrapped from their fresh tissue-paper covering the brand-new silk vest, the hand-embroidered chemise, the iridescent silk petticoat, all the bewitching accessories reserved for an occasion that might have been and was not. How could she help being unhappy at the sight of them? It was so hard to be deprived of everything a girl longed for, had the right to expect, a real trousseau, a proper wedding. These poor little things were all she had to take the place of so much she could never have now. And there they were, not even seen! Life had been very cruel. And yet? She was standing by the bedside refolding them, but she stopped, put her hand to her forehead. He had spoken of another marriage, he wanted a "proper" wedding too. Could it still be done? She returned to her packing, hastily replaced the things, restrapped the partition. Throwing on her dressing-gown, she ran down the passage and called Julia.

"Juley, come into my room, there's something I must say to you."

A moment later the little woman, her black frizzy hair standing up like corkscrews all over her head, flicked into the room and shut the door.

"What is it?" she asked. "You said not to come to-night and I wanted to ever so much." She was on the tiptoe of curiosity. Elinor threw herself on the bed.

"Juley, I've been thinking we'd better keep it secret after all, for a time. Just to see how things go—he wants to have a proper wedding, he said so several times."

Julia became very serious and lifted her forefinger.

"Now, Nell, it's no use saying that. I know too much, I'm years older than you are. You've got to let me do as I think. You aren't goin' to risk your whole lifetime for a wedding, surely?"

Elinor was impressed, indeed her mind was made up to do as her friend advised, but she longed to be comforted.

"Just to think I shall never be a bride. It's so hard, Juley, it's so hard," and she buried her face in the pillow while Julia, deeply touched, comforted her for all she was worth.

CHAPTER IV

i

The O'Haras had seen them off on the boat and they were steaming back to Manitou. Richard was in sober mood and spoke of their future and his plans. It was agreed that Mrs Colhouse should be informed of the marriage as soon as they arrived and that he would leave the same evening for Cliftonburg. The great thing was to return to his work ; he could do a lot in a short time if he tried, and now it was worth while. It was a cool cloudy day and he wrapped her up and found a spot on the lee-side sheltered from the wind. He was very considerate to her ; she had never felt so fond of him. They got on well together and he told her many things she wanted to know. She was getting to understand everything. He answered all her questions and hardly asked her any. The more she heard, the more convinced she became that the future would be rosy. Not that he said so. On the contrary, he spoke of it with apprehension, warned her again and again to be prepared for anything. His father would most likely give him nothing when he knew of their engagement ; he would certainly not let them come to London, but he hoped he would gradually relent if he worked hard. As the time got shorter and they approached Manitou, he said he hated the thought of leaving her, but he knew if he took her with him it would be " all up " with him. He got more and more tender and affectionate, holding her hand and every now and then kissing her. She had never known anyone like him before, he behaved like a younger brother who was going back to school. Mammy had always said he was a baby. One thing was certain, she herself would have to be the one to manage everything ; she would have to show that he could, that he must, trust to her judgment, do always what she advised.

When they arrived at the cottage Mrs Colhouse was sitting outside her door, as usual talking over the fence to Mrs Shuter, who promptly disappeared at their approach. Telling Richard to stay outside a moment, Elinor kissed her mother and drew her into the sitting-room. " We're married," she said triumphantly.

Mrs Colhouse gave a gasp and, putting her hand to her heart, subsided on to the sofa.

" Married ! Nell ! "

" So that's done." Elinor subconsciously repeated Richard's words after they had shot the rapids, " but we're only saying we're engaged—for the present."

Mrs Colhouse was too astonished to speak.

" And he's going back to Cliftonburg to-night. He doesn't want his father and mother to know till after his uncle gets back and makes it all right with them."

" To think of your being married to that boy ! You scarcely know him."

" I know him more than you think."

Without waiting to hear what her mother might say, she went to the door. " Come in, Richard. I've told mammy we're married."

For an instant the boy looked at her and at her mother, who still sat half-collapsed on the sofa. Then he went forward and, bending down, kissed Mrs Colhouse on the cheek.

" I shall call you mammy now," he said gaily. " I hope you aren't upset. Elinor and I thought it the best thing to do : it wasn't any use writing and—and——- " He stopped and looked again from one to the other.

Mrs Colhouse folded her hands, interlacing the fingers, her head was bent and she did not speak.

The boy sat down by her and put his hand on hers. " You aren't unhappy, are you, Mrs Colhouse—mammy, I mean. I know it's rather a—rather hasty—but everything is all right, isn't it, Elinor ? "

He looked up at his wife appealingly.

Elinor was thinking how foolishly he was behaving. Why couldn't he be stronger, more manly?

"All right? Of course it is. We love each other, mammy, that's all there is to it, and Richard wanted to make sure of me. But so far as everyone else is concerned, we're only engaged as yet. I'll tell you everything by degrees; there's not much time before he goes."

Elinor took Richard up to her room and brought him a can of water with her own hands.

"Oh, I'm so sorry; thanks, thanks," he relieved her of it and kissed her. "What a jolly little room." He looked round. "I say, what a lot of clothes!"

Indeed they were everywhere, hung on pegs on the wall, on the door and in band-boxes piled on each other in the corners and even under the bed.

He poured water into the basin, remarking: "I'll hurry up and get out of your way."

What a curious creature he was. He was here in her room, where she slept and had her intimate being, and he was as unconscious of it all, apparently, as though she were his sister. Would he always be like that? She stood an instant looking at him as he plunged his face into the basin, making the water bubble as he snorted in it. Had she gone too fast and too far? Was it possible that she could no longer rely on rousing his feelings? He had shown passion enough that one evening. She went softly out of the room, casting the problem over in her mind, and had hardly reached the bottom of the stairs when he rejoined her.

At supper a magnificent box of chocolates made its appearance with the name of a well-known New York candy store on the lid. Elinor had herself placed it on the table; it might be a good or a bad move to reveal the name of the sender. She hadn't made up her mind when an innocent comment by Mrs Colhouse settled the question.

"Mr Galton has spread himself, Nell."

Elinor looked at Richard. His face was black, and from then on he was silent.

Ought she to be pleased or the reverse? It certainly gratified her to see that he cared enough to be so violently jealous, for it could be nothing but jealousy. But she didn't intend giving up her right to harmless attentions such as boxes of candy.

They had no sooner risen from the table than he led her outside.

He began angrily: "How dare that cad Galton send you that box of sweets. You oughtn't to accept presents from him; you know the sort of man he is."

"How was I to know who sent it? I saw a box addressed to me and opened it, and there was his card inside."

"You ought to have sent it back. Give it to me. I'll jolly well show him that——"

"Richard, dear, don't be angry about nothing. It would make me ridiculous if you were to send it back now; we've eaten half the top layer."

"I wish I'd known. Look here, Elinor, don't you write him. Give me his beastly card and I'll answer him. Where is it?"

"I don't know, I think I threw it away." Elinor had carefully preserved it, regarding the superscription: "To the loveliest of southern belles from her fervent admirer" as highly flattering.

"Will you promise me never to write to him?" Richard spoke earnestly.

"Yes, dearest, I do promise you. You have a right to it."

He seized her hand and, kissing it, said: "Thank you; thank you."

They went in and sat down together on the sofa. Mrs Colhouse had disappeared, the help was clearing the table.

"The thought of that man Galton reminds me of Cliftonburg. He makes me long for England. I believe I'm homesick."

Elinor had never in her life experienced that emotion and could not imagine it.

"You see, here in America no one cares about anything but money or what they call amusement. Everything seems to be moving, everyone is in a hurry, there's no time for any-

thing. I like to sit down and read sometimes or have a quiet talk, but at Cliftonburg they never stop at home : they're either at business or in bars. I do hate the place." He broke off abruptly.

She thoroughly disliked her own people, but her idea of life was certainly not sitting in one's house and reading.

" I can't tell you how I hate going back to Cliftonburg. The governor's one idea is work—work for its own sake. He'd rather walk up hill than drive just because it's more disagreeable, and yet he always says he doesn't want me to go into his business."

" Not go into his business ! Surely you don't mean to miss such a chance as that ? "

" I suppose it would be the best way to make money. But I want to know Europe and see beautiful things and read and think. That's living : sitting in an office isn't."

For Elinor, Europe was Paris and London, and perhaps Switzerland, where she knew people went to see the mountains. She had also heard that Rome was fashionable and she knew that several New York society girls had married Italian princes and counts. But this idea of moving about to see what he called beautiful things and think about them, must be crushed at all costs. The idea of settling down to a small income in order to loaf, when he could make a pile, once he got into his father's business ! She must get that out of his head.

" Richard, dear, haven't you got a little off the track ? You said you meant to work for my sake, didn't you, and that you could do a lot in a short time so that when your uncle got back he'd put things right."

He jumped up and took a few steps as though he were shaking something off, then plopped down beside her again on the sofa.

" Of course, dear girl, of course. You're quite right. I'll stick to my work ; you can count on me." He put his arm round her and kissed her. She determined to improve the occasion.

" Believe me, Richard," she said, with great earnestness, " money is the one thing that matters ; you can do all the other things afterwards. I've seen enough to know. Leisure

means loafing. My father had that sort of notion about money not mattering, and poor mammy and I have paid for it. You don't want me to go on paying all my life, do you ? "

He kissed her again. " You shan't pay. I'll work. I promise you I'll work as I never have before. Now I shall be going in a few minutes. I haven't got much money but I can—— " He put his hand into his inner pocket.

She stopped him at once. " Not a cent, Richard—not till we're together. I couldn't."

" Why not ? You're my wife now."

She half closed her eyes and looked away sadly. " Not properly yet, dear."

He ran his hand through his hair and held it over his forehead ; he seemed to be puzzling over his reply.

" Not properly yet," he repeated ; " no." He dropped on his knees beside her and grasped her hand, holding it to his lips. " But it must be so—it must—for a time. I shall always be thinking of you. Promise me, if you need anything you'll tell me. I shan't spend anything scarcely from now on. I shall save every penny for you."

Elinor leant forward and kissed him softly. " I promise."

" I shan't go anywhere or see anyone. I shall just work. In a few weeks Uncle Theo will be back, and then—— " He kissed her again and strained her to him. When he lifted his head, tears were in his eyes. " I only realise now how I hate leaving you." He stood up, gazing at her. " If only my mother knew you ! "

When he had gone she sat down and wrote to Mr Galton, scolding him for sending the candies which were delicious, but telling him he mustn't write to her or send her anything now as she was engaged to Richard Kurt. Perhaps they would meet again after she was married.

iii

During the forty-eight hours following Richard's departure Elinor was surprised at her own calmness. Considering the

uncertainty of her situation she had good reason to feel apprehensive. An affectionately worded telegram had duly reached her. It was now followed by a missive of a different description, over which she was still puzzling. It had been written in the train and was in the form of a poem, called *The Song of the Wheel.* It was absurd, of course, but it afforded proof of his continuous thought of her during his journey. There were certain lines she could not understand and they stuck in her head, absorbed though she was in edging a reconstructed bodice with *passementerie.* She laid down her work and read it again :

Bumpety-bump, jinkety-jink
The wheels roll on
As I wretchedly think.
Tear along, rush along,
Hurry and speed,
Give me the furious help that I need
To stay my remorse,
To turn me to steel.
Save my heart and my soul
From destruction, O wheel !

What did it mean ? What was the remorse about and why did he want to be turned into steel ? And why were his heart and soul in danger of destruction ? After several minutes of brow-contracting reflection Elinor gave it up and went on with her work, deciding that it wasn't worth bothering about and just meant nothing at all.

Something more exciting drove the silly rhyme out of her head. Mrs Colhouse entered the room with a telegram.

" *Cliftonburg papers announce marriage of course am denying everything as you will writing.* *Kurt.*"

She read it over again, threw down her work and exclaimed " It's all out."

Tiresome as usual, mammy looked grave. " I can't see why you should be pleased at that."

" Oh, can't you ? Well, send that slut for a paper."

Elinor quickly threw off her *négligé*, dressed herself and went downstairs.

Her mother was poring over the paper. She seized it from her and read

ROMANTIC RUNAWAY MARRIAGE

SOUTHERN BELLE ELOPES WITH WEALTHY ENGLISHMAN

EARL'S GRANDSON WEDS DAUGHTER OF DR COLHOUSE OF WATERVILLE

According to the whole-column account, Miss Elinor Colhouse, daughter of the celebrated physician Dr Colhouse of Waterville, famed for her beauty even in a land where beauty was a woman's birthright, had eloped with Mr Richard Kurt, son of Mr William Kurt, the world-famous banker of London, and nephew of the honoured president of the C.W. & M. " It will interest our readers to hear that Mr Richard Kurt's mother is of a noble English family, though her son, with true patrician modesty, does not advertise the fact." The article terminated by wishing happiness to the young couple.

At the first reading Elinor's eagerness was so great that she only skimmed it, the second time she felt that she had not read it as thoroughly as it deserved, the third time she read it aloud.

Mrs Colhouse gazed speechlessly at Elinor who calmly folded the paper and put it under the clock on the mantelpiece. " Now, I'm going out for a little."

" Do you think that's right, Nell ? You're sure to meet someone who'll ask questions."

" Suppose I do ? I guess I'll know what to say."

" Are you going to deny it ? "

" I shan't say one way or the other."

She didn't mean to miss the full enjoyment to be got out of the sensation and made straight for the hotel. While she was asking the reception clerk to reserve a good double bedroom and bathroom for a friend she was expecting, someone

addressed her by name. Turning round, she found herself face to face with Mr M'Alpin.

" Oh, Miss Colhouse " he gasped effusively " may I congratulate you ? We're all thrilled by the news."

Elinor drew herself up and stared blankly at him. " What news ? " she asked with hauteur.

" Isn't it true then ? "

" I don't know what you're alluding to ? "

With an expression of astonishment he fetched *The Detroit Free Press* and pointed with his finger at the front page. Taking it from him, she read it through and lifted her eyebrows. " They seem to know all about it."

She handed the paper back and bowed coldly. Passing through the midst of a number of guests whose gestures showed that they had been closely observing M'Alpin and herself she departed with dignity.

As she had anticipated, the next morning brought her a telegram from Richard announcing his arrival the following day, adding, however, something she was less prepared for but which delighted her still more.

" *Be ready accompany me back here.*"

She gave it to her mother to read.

" So he's going to take you back with him ? "

" Of course he is and I've ordered a room at the hotel."

" A room at the hotel—what for ? "

" For Richard and myself of course. Now I guess we'll get busy, mammy. There's that mauve *crêpe de Chine* to finish and the red blouse. You can send the black taffeta on."

iv

She met Richard at the station. His face was pallid, there were dark lines under his eyes. But his clothes to her satisfaction were as immaculate as ever.

He embraced her warmly but his manner was serious.

" I've taken a room at the hotel," she said.

" I don't want to go there. I want to go somewhere we can talk."

" Of course, dear, I meant we can sleep there."

A look of sudden realisation crossed his features. " Oh, of course ! Isn't there a room for me at the cottage ? Anything will do for one night. We'll leave by the morning train. Are you ready ? "

" Packed to the last hairpin," she answered like a competent quartermaster-general.

" I'll just leave my bag at the cottage for now, I want to be in the air. I haven't slept a wink, my head feels as if it would burst."

They walked out of the station, she with her arm in his.

" Tell me everything, Richard, from the beginning."

" I will—gradually. You must give me time. My brain's not working yet. I tried to write but I had to give it up. Besides, everything's changed now."

" I got the poem."

" The poem," he repeated, adding as though in an afterthought, " Oh, that. That's all changed too, everything's changed—— " he stood still. " I don't know where I am —really." He looked closely at her, his eyes wandered down her. She had a light-coloured linen skirt and wore a fawn foulard scarf round her neck. They were standing at the side of the dusty road under a tree to let a buggy pass. Elinor recognised M'Alpin driving his trotting horse and ignored his salutation. Richard put his bag down and fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, extracting a little cardboard box, out of which he took a tiny package of tissue paper. " Take off your glove, dear."

The glove fitted closely ; he was impatient, shaky. Intending to help her, he pulled at the finger-tips and let the ring fall into a heap of dust.

" I don't see why you had to do that now—in the public road."

He was stooping down and looking for the ring. " I couldn't wait " he said without looking up " here it is."

He pulled out his handkerchief and wiped it carefully, took

the third finger of her left hand and slipped the ring over it. " It's rather large, I'm afraid—— " holding her fingers in his palm, " I thought you'd like it better than the ordinary affair."

She twisted the little curb chain round and round her tapering finger with its long, pointed nail, looking at it critically.

" It's very pretty : so unusual."

At the cottage Mrs Colhouse was discreetly out of the way. Richard deposited his bag.

" Let's go out at once," he said.

She stood in front of him. She knew she was looking simple, sweet, captivating, and he behaved as though he saw nothing. What was he made of ?

Suddenly as though a new idea had struck him, he put his arm round her waist and kissed her several times.

" I thought you'd forgotten my existence."

He took hold of her hand. " You mustn't judge me now. I'm not altogether responsible."

They walked slowly in the direction of the lake. He stopped again in that sudden way of his.

" Let's go where we went that first day."

She made use of the glance with half-closed lids. It was a good serviceable expression, meaning several different things and applicable in varying situations. It was at once equivocal and eloquent. The moment pointed to the vanity of words, they were both face to face with fact, they were married.

They reached the gate, the bars of which lay on the ground, apparently as they had left them. He stood looking at them, then at her. They went on slowly and in silence. She could observe him cautiously out of the corner of her eye, his were on the ground.

They reached the felled trees and again he stood still observing them as though he wanted to photograph them on his mind. He threw down his stick and laid his jacket on them as before. " Wait a second though." He picked up the jacket again and feeling in the pockets, took out a folded newspaper, a cigarette-case and matches. She sat down and

he lighted a cigarette, seating himself in front of her on the scrubby grass. He drew a deep whiff or two.

" The first person I saw when I got to Cliftonburg was a chap called Jim Baldwin, and the first thing he did was to stick the damned *Enquirer* under my nose. Here it is."

Elinor took the paper. Except for additional embroidery suitable to Cliftonburg taste, it was a duplicate of what she had already seen. She passed the paper back to him without comment ; it seemed wisest to say nothing.

" You can imagine my feelings. If it was in *The Enquirer*, it would be in every paper in the States. Jim stared at me with a silly grin on his face, waiting to hear what I had to say." Richard stopped and looked at her. " I know you're thinking what a fool I was to deny it. I dare say I was a fool. Anyhow, it doesn't matter now one way or the other. I was thinking, how did it come out ? who's done this ? while I was denying it. Naturally Jim didn't believe me, said it was sure to come out. But I stuck to it like Peter and kept repeating ' It's a damned lie,' hardly knowing what I was saying. In a place like Cliftonburg more people know Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows."

Elinor thought he uttered the last words bitterly.

He lit another cigarette. " It seemed to me that everyone had read that damned paper, with its grandson of an earl, world-famous banker and the rest of it. I felt I could sink into the ground with humiliation. I shall never forget that morning, not if I live for ever. It's the awful ghastly caddishness of it all."

Elinor couldn't for the life of her see it in that light. She understood his being taken by surprise and worried by their marriage coming out ; it had upset all his plans and he was naturally afraid of the consequences, but she failed to see anything humiliating in the publicity from any point of view. As far as she personally was concerned, it was a glorious triumph. Whether he was the grandson of an earl or not everyone would think so and that was what mattered. But she had no intention of telling him how she felt ; on the contrary she would adopt his point of view externally.

" Yes. It is caddish of course but you know what newspapers are."

" Caddish. American papers are the most poisonous on earth. They're unfit for—for—I won't say what they're unfit for and the men who write for them are unscrupulous blackguards. The fellow who stuck that in ought to be horsewhipped. And if I knew who he was, I'd—— "

Elinor almost gasped her relief. So he didn't suspect even now !

He mastered his anger and began again.

" I couldn't face going to the office. I took a cable car instead and went right up to Chestnut Hills—out into the country—I wanted to go where I could think. I must have walked a longish way and all the time I was turning things over in my mind. But I couldn't decide. At the end I was as uncertain as at the beginning. When I got back there were three reporters waiting for me. Was it true that I was married, *The Evening Post* said it had authority to deny it ? Was that true ? I told them I had nothing to say, that whether I was married or unmarried concerned nobody but the lady and myself." He blew a long breath through his lips without looking at Elinor. He had been talking as though his narrative concerned no one in particular, as though it were more than anything else a relief to his own feelings. She had been following the recital intently, anxious not to miss a word. She saw herself cast for the most interesting part in the drama. All over the American continent people would be reading about her, it was intensely moving and exciting.

" There's more yet. While I was getting rid of the reporters, the telephone rang. It was Dr. Flössheim. He's my uncle's best friend in America. It was he who sent me north because I'd had rather a bad go of a sort of cholera."

" Is he a Jew ? "

" Yes, I suppose so. He's far and away the whitest man in Cliftonburg, the only European. I went straight off to see him. You don't know how I felt when he put his arm on my shoulder." He turned his head away to master himself. " I tried to deny it all at first but he knew at once and I knew he

knew. He told me there was nothing to be ashamed of. I might have been foolish or wise, that depended on the girl. He asked who you were and I told him all I knew. It wasn't much, of course. I told him your father was a doctor and lived in Waterville and he took a directory of doctors' names off the top of his writing-desk, but he couldn't find your father's. He asked me if I was sure your father was a doctor. I told him of course. He didn't say any more about that but asked me about you. And I told him everything—— "

Elinor started. " Everything? What do you mean by everything? "

" I told him how pretty you are and how I'd fallen in love with you and all that and how we'd gone up to St Mary's and I couldn't—I couldn't—you know what I mean."

Elinor was roused. For the first time she had a feeling of discomfort, if not apprehension. She sat up straight and looked very sharply at him.

" No; I don't know. What did you say—exactly? "

" I said that I had meant only to be engaged to you but that—that it wouldn't have been fair to you—that I felt I couldn't leave you like that and that we both decided to get married and keep it a secret. And I told him about the O'Haras being there—and all that."

Richard had ceased speaking to the air, he was looking her straight in the face now. Elinor listened eagerly.

" What did he say then? "

" I don't think he said anything. He took up a paper and handed it to me, it was a cable from my Uncle Theo. I don't remember the words exactly, something like this:

" '*New York Herald Paris states Richard married. His parents very anxious kindly obtain information and cable fully.*' "

Richard pulled out a cigarette and lit it, rose to his feet and took a few steps, then stood in front of her again.

" When I read that, I felt as though the ground had given way under me. Of course I was a damned fool not to have realised that it would be cabled over but up to that second it

never occurred to me. I read it over and over again. Those words on that bit of paper were Uncle Theo's. It seemed impossible—so quickly, before I'd had time even to think, before I could write and explain or do anything, I don't remember what I said then. The next thing I recall is that he showed me a cable he had been writing. I remember that :

" ' *Richard married to very nice girl cable instructions.*'

' I shall send this now,' he said, ' and your uncle will receive it in London to-morrow morning. Go to Manitou at once and bring her back here. By to-morrow evening I shall have a reply.' Before he said good-bye he told me not to worry, he was sure everything would be all right. Now my people knew, I could be above-board. And I thought of how much worse it might have been. If it hadn't been for him I should have gone on denying it and—— " He laughed in a curious forced way so that she stared at him, surprised.

" What's coming is the best. The next morning I'd packed my bag and was having breakfast when all of a sudden I heard a loud voice in the hall. I went to the door and there I saw a short, thick-set chap. He was shouting in old darkie Enoch's ear that he wanted to see me. When he caught sight of me, he came forward and said : ' Mr Richard Kurt, I want a word with you.' I took him into the dining-room. ' I'm Joe Colhouse. Are you married to my sister or are you not ? That's what I'm here to know.' "

Richard jumped to his feet and laughed again.

" I don't see anything funny in that, American men feel that way about the honour of their women."

Richard laughed no longer. " We soon made friends, Joe's a very good sort. He showed me his pistol, he called it a gun, and told me that he was right glad he hadn't shown it to me another way. He's coming to meet us at Cliftonburg as soon as we get there. I've got to the end of my story now."

He threw himself down on the grass and rested his forehead on his arms.

" Then we might as well go back to the cottage," Elinor

suggested. He had apparently told her all there was to tell and it was getting late ; supper would be ready and they had to get up to the hotel.

They walked along some distance in silence till he said : " I want your mother to know everything."

Elinor wondered why he said that. " Of course you can tell it all over again to her if you like." She was unable to resist putting a contemptuous tone into her voice.

He shot a quick glance at her. " Thanks, I don't think I'll do that. I'm not pleased enough with myself to want to repeat it."

She was puzzled again. Why couldn't he say what he meant instead of implying all sorts of things ? " What are you specially displeased about ? " she asked.

He seemed to close his lips and he didn't look at her as he answered ; " Everything."

" I suppose you include our being married." She was being purposely provocative. She would rather have it out and have done with it.

" Since you ask me, yes," he answered firmly.

She stood still.

" You mean you wish you hadn't married me ? "

Something within drove her forward, drove her as a murderer is driven to the spot where he committed his crime.

" Look here, Elinor. Don't make me say things I don't want to say. You know I never wanted to get married—in this sort of way. But we are married and whatever happens, I'm going to do all I can."

" Oh, I see." Elinor's expression and voice were impregnated with irony. " You're going to do your duty under the disagreeable circumstances."

" I never said that. What I said before, I say again. It was wrong to get married without my telling my people and I'm afraid of your suffering through it. That's what I meant when I said I wanted your mother to know everything. I want her to know what I said on the boat and afterwards on the bridge at St Mary's. I want her to know that I really did try to prevent all this happening."

His voice dropped as he uttered the last words. They were still standing at the entrance to the little wood, the gate with its bars off was just in front of them.

" What happening ? " Elinor simply couldn't grasp what he was alluding to.

" Can't you see what I mean ? The whole thing. The shock to my people, the disgusting papers, your brother coming after me as though I were a sort of—I don't know what."

Certainly the Joe episode had unnecessarily complicated matters, but what did he want to harp on that for ?

" No one need know anything about Joe if you don't tell them."

" Tell them ! " he looked as if she'd struck him. " I'd rather—oh, Elinor—I wish you could see what I mean. I think your mother will understand better. That's why I want her to know."

They walked on but she was still mystified. What did he want, anyway ? So far as she could see, everything had turned out uncommonly well.

v

Reaching the cottage, they found Mrs Colhouse awaiting them eagerly. Yet another telegram had arrived. It was addressed to Richard.

" Uncle cables you are to take your wife to his house come and see me on arrival.

" Flossheim."

Elinor ran her eyes over it. " We're to go to Richard's uncle's house at once, mammy."

" Your uncle is fine ! " Mrs Colhouse exclaimed.

Richard made no observation. He had taken the telegram from Elinor's hand and was reading it over and over again as though he couldn't believe the words.

" Of course he would do that. It's the right way to behave.

I'm his niece now." Elinor was exceedingly pleased, so pleased that going close to Richard, whose eyes were still glued to the telegram, she put her arm round his neck and kissed him. " You'll see, everything will go well now, dear. Don't worry any more." Then releasing him. " Let's have supper, mammy ; we've got to go to the hotel, remember, and time's getting on."

Richard looked up, still holding the telegram. " I say, don't let's go to that beastly hotel."

Elinor faced round. " You don't seem to remember there's no room here."

" I don't care. I'll sleep on the sofa."

What sort of a man was he anyway ? Within ten minutes was a nice comfortable room, she was his newly married wife ; and he preferred sleeping uncomfortably on a sofa alone. She had engaged the room and M'Alpin had seen them. Up there in the brightly lit hotel everyone would be agog to see them, to see her, the heroine of a romance. She had pictured it all. They would pass through the crowded hall, ignoring everyone. It would take a few minutes for the clerk to get the key and accompany them to the elevator. Very likely M'Alpin had sent flowers up to their room. Everyone's eyes would be upon her, all the girls would be wild with envy. Was she to forgo all this without a struggle ?

She took him upstairs to her room after supper, showed him her two beautifully packed trunks, and a large New York hatbox ; she was rightly proud of her accomplished packing.

" And here's my grip, everything for the night, and I've arranged for the express people to call for the trunks in the morning. I thought you'd want to be alone with me, dear." She turned her eyes down and tucked in the lacy neck of the nightgown within the bag while she spoke. She couldn't be so unrefined as to give him more than a very slight hint. Would he take it ?

" I quite understand, dear, very thoughtful of you. But I can't face the music, I'm worn out. The thought of a hotel to-night freezes me. I'd much rather sleep on the sofa downstairs."

From the finality in his tone she knew she would have to

abandon her project. It was evident that he was incapable of appreciating a girl's feelings, especially such a girl as she was. He understood nothing. This might be the very last time she would ever see Manitou, that Manitou would see her. Yet she must slink off like a little nobody. Romance alone entitled her to play her part but she must be deprived of it just because he was disinclined to go to a hotel. And he was unfeeling besides. It didn't occur to him that he was humiliating her by showing he preferred being alone on this first night that they could openly and without fear of consequences be man and wife in fact as well as in name. She wasn't an animal kind of woman, thank God.

" You needn't think I'm specially anxious to share a room with you." Her resentment had boiled over, she couldn't keep the words back.

He was standing beside her leaning against the bed with his hand on the edge of the bag. At these words he stepped away and glared at her.

" Elinor. How can you speak like that ? I don't understand you."

She drew herself up haughtily. " So I observe. I shouldn't try if I were you." She turned sharply and walked out of the room.

He followed her slowly downstairs and seating himself near her mother, began talking as though nothing special had happened.

It was maddening her to see how little he cared but she wouldn't show it. The sooner he learnt that she could be as indifferent as he was, the better !

After supper mammy with her usual tactlessness proposed that he should have her room ; she'd go and prepare it at once, Nell and she could sleep together for that one night.

Richard would not have that, he would sleep on the sofa, he said.

Elinor did not stay to hear the argument out ; she had had enough. " Fight it out between you. Good-night."

He could sleep on the doormat for all she cared.

PART III

CHAPTER I

i

Ada Kurt's black-clad figure was deeply sunk in a softly cushioned arm-chair. As her brother Richard entered the drawing-room she was dispensing tea to her younger sister, a bright schoolgirl of sixteen, whose hair, in a long thick plait, reached to her waist. Richard had a special affection for Olivia, due perhaps to her being ten years his junior, and, while she helped Ada with the heavy silver tea-kettle, she stole a shy, subdued glance at him. He noticed her naturally happy face was stained with the ready tears of childhood, and he felt how grateful such relief would have been to himself, dry-eyed ever since the telegram announced his mother's death.

Events had crowded swiftly on one another in the last forty-eight hours. As sometimes happens in times of crisis, a chasm seemed to divide him from the immediate past. It was as though he had traversed great distances; behind and beyond, time stretched indefinite and remote.

At his heart lay an indescribable oppression. His confused arrival in the fog—the crowded station—the friendly porter, the home-coming and the ringing of the bell, the hushed whisper of the servant, the very departure of the cabman, had burnt in upon his mind an ineffaceable memory which disfigured his mental outlook like a scar. When he thought at all his mind distorted into unnecessary ugliness the harmless movements and actions of the living.

His father had asked him if he wished to visit the death-chamber and he had replied with a "No," the curtness of which would have been tempered had he realised its effect. He saw his mother clearly living and he shrank from seeing that which was no more her whom he had greatly loved.

A kindly word from his father—a glance of sympathy, a mere pressure from the hand which had lain so heavily on him all these years, might have opened Richard's heart to him who was suffering the agony of one who for the moment thinks he is deprived of all in life. But Mr Kurt had never understood his son, and at this poignant moment his attitude of cold aloofness struck at Richard's soul like a swordthrust.

At the funeral he had avoided expressions of sympathy, shrinking away from the crowd of mourners whose conventional phrases his imagination interpreted as veiled reproaches for unfilial conduct. These people, many of them mere social acquaintances, were entirely ignorant of his shortcomings, and, had they known these, their indifferent opinion would in any case have been more lenient than his nature allowed him to suppose. In his state of morbid sensitiveness a word, a look, became a blow. And how he suffered from the singing of the hymns and the funeral flowers! Now he was in the familiar drawing-room with his mother's portrait looking down on him—the picture he had always known, painted when he was a child, which in his boyhood and afterwards was the only object he cared for in his home.

Suddenly Ada's shrill voice caused him to start—so that he half fell back against someone who had noiselessly entered the room. It was his father.

Ada had said: "How is Elinor?" Father and son exchanged glances but no word passed, and the young woman continued: "Do have a cup of tea, papa. I know you must want it."

It was not Ada's fault that Mr Kurt entered at just that moment, but Richard felt it was characteristic of her to add her small weight to his load of remorseful sorrow. He knew that his wife's name had, since the quarrel, been taboo in the family, and he felt the discordance of its sudden impact at such a time as this. Every chance circumstance, every luckless word, conspired to widen the breach between him and his father. Not even a common sorrow could bring them together. As he mechanically took a cup of tea, there was a brief and pregnant silence.

Ada seemed to think that tension can be relieved by purposeless and irrelevant speech.

" Who's going to reply to all those ? " She pointed to a great heap of envelopes. " I suppose Olivia and I will have to."

Richard sat helpless.

" I dare say Richard will assist you."

His father's tone was not sarcastic, but to Richard his words were irrationally suspect.

" Certainly I will do so if the girls wish."

As he spoke his uncle entered the room.

ii

Two brothers could hardly offer a greater contrast than William and Frederick Kurt. William was considerably above middle height, slight and well proportioned. He wore a short, square-cut beard which, originally red, had turned gradually, with years, to a golden-grey. His hair, uncommonly plentiful for a man approaching sixty, curled away from its central parting in large, crisp, grey-brown waves above a forehead unusually high and broad and white. The eyes, generally averted save for swift glances, were dark, small and very piercing ; the mouth was intensely flexible, with full but not thick red lips showing through the hair. When he spoke he had a way of turning his head sideways. The habitual pose was that of concentrated attention. One felt that nothing escaped him. The arms were usually held behind the back, one hand resting easily in the other ; occasionally one would be used sparingly for gesture ; the hands were noticeable, they were slender and symmetrical, with long fingers, and downed with red hair.

William Kurt rose as his brother entered and went to meet him, and the two stood talking for a moment in low tones. Thus one could best observe the difference in height, build and gesture. Frederick was short, of square stout build, clean-shaved but for a trifle of whisker. His dark grey hair was thicker, the curls were closer, the lips thinner. The

eyes were of lighter colour and the pose lacked William's grace. The head was equally small and well shaped, but the forehead was wanting in distinction, and the neck was thick. The one pronounced thing about the man was a look of firmness and decision ; in his voice, in his manner of standing, in his look of contemptuous inattention, one read self-confidence and self-esteem. He seemed the embodiment of dogmatic strength, an epitome of self-reliance.

There was an indefinable foreign air about the two difficult to analyse or describe. Apart from the readiness with which they dropped into French, German or Italian, there was nothing in manner, expression or gesture which one could identify as un-English. In spite of this it permeated their being and caused in both brothers a certain lack of conformity which drew attention to them. This was heightened, in the case of William, by a natural distinction of appearance, by the carrying of the shapely head, and by a manner which to women was caressing and to men courteous and urbane.

As they exchanged low-spoken words each seemed to avoid the other's eyes with a noticeable persistence.

There was no purpose in this. It was a habit, significant only to those who seek mutual response in expressive glances. In each man's case it was the unconscious symbol of an habitual reserve, enabling him to mask his feelings and protect his heart against sentiment or appeal. The brothers had for each other a love passing that of women. Yet at this moment of almost tragic intensity, from no single outward act, gesture or expression could any stranger have imagined the passionate sympathy that united them.

iii

In the shadows of the large London drawing-room, the obscurity of which was accentuated by the disposal of furniture and screens, cabinets and palms, in the taste of the period, all the members of the family were now assembled, their forms dimly outlined in the recesses. Mrs Kurt had always disliked bright illuminations, and the use of wall

brackets was restricted to occasions of dinner-parties or receptions.

The three electric lamps, heavily shaded, hardly did more than cause a fitful halo in their immediate neighbourhood. One of them upon the table where the tea things were laid illuminated Ada's small hands and lap, but left her face and figure a vaguely distinguishable outline reddened on the side near the fire. The other girl was whispering to Richard in a far corner by the grand piano ; Mr Kurt stood with his back to the fire. A letter he was holding rustled. He spoke, and again Richard started, waiting motionless and expectant, listening intently. His uncle had joined the silent group and stood by Olivia, stroking her hair.

" Children, I wanted to tell you that your mother left no will. She had—as I think you all know—nothing to leave you but the memory of her love—and such few personal belongings—jewellery, I mean, and knick-knacks—which later on you girls shall divide. This letter ! "—he paused and choked back the sob that rose in his throat—" with the thoughtfulness she always had—for me—for you all—she left in her writing-table drawer. It contains little—almost nothing that I need read to you. Some day—when I am gone—some of you may care to read it. It is a record of the love—the unceasing constant love that was—was—always—which will be with me till the end. Beside this she only adds some wishes—which—needless to say—I shall respect. She wants—for you, Ada—her eldest daughter, to have her pearls—my marriage present to her—and to you, Richard " —he paused again, but this time there was an evident reluctance in his voice, an effort to say something unpleasant to himself—" she leaves her portrait—with these words : ' It may serve to remind my boy of how much he once loved his mother.' That is all." The words came spasmodically, almost gaspingly—his emotion was evident—impressive, moving.

Richard tried to speak but the words would not come. He just remained there gazing stupidly towards his father, who, with an oblique glance in his son's direction, left the room.

His uncle looked at him. The clean-cut, rather hard face

softened. Bending, he put his arm about his nephew's shoulder. " Never mind ; be a man ! " he said. There was kindly sympathy in the tone and Richard looked up gratefully.

" My father never understood," he answered sadly ; " he never understood."

Frederick Kurt pursed his lips, sighing through the closed teeth, then slowly followed his brother downstairs.

iv

" What are you going to do, Richard ? " The question came, of course, from Ada. " Are you going back to Elinor, or will she come and join you ? "

" I don't know, Ada : I've had no time to think. And I must talk to the Governor and see what he wishes."

" I don't think he cares one way or the other. You can't very well expect him to, can you ? "

The shrill biting tone was more than Richard could bear.

" Won't you ever learn to keep quiet, Ada ? " There was a note of anger in his voice. " Can't you see that your questions are annoying me ? How can I have any plans—yet ? "

" Oh, well—I'll say nothing. I don't see what you've got to be so touchy for. You resent it when one takes no interest, and when one does you're offended. He's pretty hard to please, isn't he, Olivia ? " She turned to her sister, who was looking over the constantly increasing pile of condolence letters.

" I think you're beastly to him, Ada," she said, " that's what I think. Dear old Dick, let's go and leave her alone."

His schoolgirl sister went over to him and patted his head. He kissed her and put his arm round her.

" Oh, Ada doesn't mean it, Olivia. It's only because her nerves are upset, I know that. I was rather rude, and I want to talk to you both. God knows when I shall see you again." He spoke gloomily, gazing into the fire. " Has the Governor given you any idea of what you're going to do ? "

" Well, Olivia will go back to Dresden, that's certain, anyhow." Olivia made a face at her sister. " As for me, I shall have a lot to see to here, at present—settling up things."

Richard wondered what " settling up " Ada would do. He could think of nothing but household bills, which he thought the housekeeper attended to.

" And then perhaps we shall go abroad."

" Why not to the villa ? " suggested Richard.

" Oh, no—poor papa said he could never bear it again now. He said that this morning after breakfast and again after the funeral. He wouldn't be able to face it alone, nor could I."

Richard considered a moment. " Well, I don't know. When a man has a habit, with no resources except that and business, it seems to me he is bound to miss it."

" That's just like you, Richard, and your everlasting carping at papa." Ada became violent, as she always did if her ideas or suggestions were called into question. " Of course we know what you mean, don't we, Olivia ? But you're quite mistaken. Papa doesn't care a pin for the gambling, really. He only does it to pass the time down there. You always think it's so amusing being stuck down at Monte Carlo all the winter for months and months. But it isn't, I can tell you, and, if it hadn't been for darling mother, papa would never have gone there. I'm jolly glad he is going to give it up."

" So shall I be, if he does," said Richard. " For his sake, not mine."

" Why for his sake especially ? "

" Because that sort of thing kills in the end. No man can stand burning the candle at both ends indefinitely. Something's got to break. The Governor's a hard worker and he's a nervous, highly-strung man. He's up at seven, worrying about business and writing letters till he goes to the rooms, then lunch and letters again, then back to the rooms till they close, except for dinner, and every day the same thing. I tell you no one can stand it. Mother couldn't—she would be with us still but for that."

Ada said nothing, she knew it was true. She had seen it

going on for the last ten years. In spite of her outward apparent hardness she had strong affections. She had been her mother's constant companion, her nurse, ever since her health had broken. How often had Ada begged her not to go to the gambling rooms. None knew better than she that the vile atmosphere, the excitement of that accursed place, had shortened her mother's life.

Richard suddenly remembered Olivia. "Don't think I'm running the Governor down, dear. I'm not in the Governor's good books, I never have been, but he has always been the kindest and best of fathers to you girls, and it is not for me to criticise him. All I mean is, that if he chucks it he'll be wise, and I hope he will for his own sake and for yours."

Richard's rare visits to the family villa, when he had occasionally gone to spend a few days with his mother, had had for him a feverish attraction. He had experienced, to his undoing, the glamour and fascination of the gambler's paradise. He had sought and found there, during the numbered days his resources lasted, an antidote to ennui which his intelligence recognised as an insidious and dangerous poison. At heart he condemned the attractions to which he yielded, and despised the life he lived as much as the people amongst whom he spent it.

When Richard went upstairs to dress for dinner he found in his room the letter he had expected.

With a sinking of the heart he tore open the large square envelope.

"Dear Richard,—You must have had an awful time, you might have sent me a line. I have no idea what is going to happen. Has anything changed, or is this sort of existence to go on?

"Gaston left yesterday—his leave was up. He's awfully keen on our going to Brussels where he's in the F.O. We might as well do that as anything else if your charming father is, as I fully expect, not going to stump up.

"All the old cats are awfully down on me. I am sure I don't know what I've done but I don't care. I'm not very well,

and am getting awfully sick of this place. All the decent people are gone or going. I write because you asked me to, but there's nothing to say.

" Elinor."

As he folded the letter, meditating his reply, Richard could see the capricious, black-haired, graceful Elinor exposed to the spiteful insinuations of those amorphous females whose chief distraction consists in disparaging attractions they envy. A glow of affection possessed him. The prospect of what lay before him, the interview with his father, the acrid references to his wife he knew he would have to swallow, caused a reaction towards her that the coldness and querulousness of her letter only increased. " Poor little woman," he thought, " all alone there without me to protect her," and, as he finished dressing, he pictured Elinor sitting in solitary elegance at her table in the Beau Rivage Restaurant.

v

The dining-room at Bruton Street was all that remained of a fine eighteenth century interior. Nineteenth-century requirements had necessitated the closing of a window and consequent lighting from above, but its original beauty of proportion as well as its chief decorative feature, the dull-gold Corinthian pillars which supported the domed ceiling, had not been interfered with. The room was reached from the open hall, wainscoted in the modern style with mahogany, by a corridor with bookcases on either side and a writing-table exposed to draughts. This was called by Mr Kurt the library.

It was here that Richard found himself after a dinner which had not raised his spirits. His sisters had left the table as quickly as they could. It had never been his father's custom to linger over his wine, of which he drank sparingly.

Father, son and uncle took their coffee in silence. Richard helped himself to a glass of brandy, regretting the liqueur-

glasses were of the old thimble-sized variety instead of the modern wine-tasters he was accustomed to; he felt an embarrassment about replenishing his glass. All three were smokers, there was some comfort in that. At last he saw by his father's face that he was preparing to speak; Richard settled himself in a large leather arm-chair and waited.

"I want to say as little as possible, Richard." His father's voice was measured. "I am glad your uncle can hear what I have to say. He feels as I do about you—your future concerns him almost as it does me. He has felt for me and for your mother in the terrible mortifications and disappointments we have suffered on your account. I don't want to go over old ground. I desire on this day to bury the past. I want to try and believe that—at last—now—you will realise all the sorrow you have caused us, and that by the grave of your mother"—he stopped and regarded Richard fixedly, then continued—"by the grave of your mother you will at last determine to mend your ways. From the time you first went to school, as a boy of eight, you have been a constant source of——"

"I thought—I beg your pardon—I thought you were not going back to the past." Richard's voice sounded harsh, provocative. In reality he was choking back the emotion his father's words had aroused.

"I did say so—and I meant it," his father continued, "but, to make you understand all your poor mother and I have suffered, I must refer to the early beginning of your career. However, I will leave the past."

Again he stopped speaking, and with a deliberation that seemed to Richard astonishing in a man who protested so much feeling he lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Out of consideration for your feelings I will not allude to the heartless wickedness of your behaviour to the mother who all her life——"

"Listen, sir. If you say another word about my mother I shall leave the room. I don't want now to say anything to distress you, but I can't stand your mentioning her—and I won't."

Richard's voice rose as he spoke ; he looked defiantly at his father.

" I am well aware, Richard, that no words of mine are likely to affect you. I had little hope of it when I determined—at great personal sacrifice—at this, the saddest moment of my life—to try once more—for the last time—to appeal to you. I see that, as always, you consider yourself a victim—a martyr."

" Why do you say that ? By what right do you insult me ? Because I am dependent on you, I suppose."

His father's voice took a pained inflection.

" Yes, Richard, you are dependent on me, and you can thank God that I am your father—instead of another—who would long ago have washed his hands of you."

" You talk to me as if I had been a criminal. What have I done ? Why do you treat me like this ? Anyhow—I'm not going to listen to you any more. Talk to my uncle—talk to my sisters—don't talk to me. You hate me—you've always hated me—ever since I was born. All I ask you is to leave me in peace—I have had enough."

The excited, angry words welled up. He felt outraged to his very soul. His impetuous feelings were uppermost. His overcharged nerves were on edge. He flung out of the room and up the stairs.

vi

" My Darling Elinor,—There is nothing to be done with these people. I only want one thing, to get away from them all. Of course the Governor had to jaw, on this day of all others. Equally, of course, I got in a rage. Consequence, bathos. Now I suppose I'm hopelessly in the cart. I know you'll blame me for being such a fool, but I couldn't help it. Anyhow, I've had all I can stand. Get ready to join me in Brussels. It's an easy night journey via Bâle. I'll leave to-morrow. Wire what day you'll be there and if you want cash or can manage. Be as economical as you can, money's very scarce, and this dishes every chance of my raising any.

" Dear little girl, I am so sorry for all the trouble I cause you News when we meet. You know you're all I care about.

" As ever, yours,

" Richard."

Taking the letter he knocked at his sister's door across the passage. Fortunately she was still awake, the light shone under the door. " Awfully sorry to disturb you, Ada," he said, " but can you give me a twopenny-halfpenny stamp ? "

" You'll find some on the writing-table," his sister answered. She was sitting up in bed examining something. " In that silver box. But what do you want one for at this time of night ? "

" Oh, I've written Elinor. I'm off to-morrow, Ada dear, that's all."

" Why so soon ? "

" Oh, the usual thing. Row with the Governor."

" Well, all I can say is you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Richard. Poor old man, on the day of mother's funeral. You've got absolutely no feeling. I never knew anyone like you."

Richard stared stupidly at his sister. As he did so his eye caught the glint of something she was holding. He went nearer the bed. In her hand was a pearl necklace. He remembered the last time he had seen it. His mother had worn it on the evening he had said the cruel words which were the last that ever passed between them.

vii

He descended the stairs slowly with the letter in his hand. He wanted it to go by the morning mail. He was wondering whether he could avoid another interview with his father before he left. When he reached the hall he heard the brothers talking and his own name repeated at intervals. The mahogany folding doors between the hall and the library were ajar. He passed out of the house noiselessly, posted

his letter at the corner, and, returning, just reached the front door as his uncle was leaving the house.

" Hallo, is that you, Richard? What a fool you are to give way to temper like that with your father. Go back to him now, at once. Tell him you are sorry. Promise me, before I go. He's very much upset."

" All right, Uncle Frederick, I will, to please you. But it's not much good. I'm off to-morrow."

" Where to? "

" I think we shall go to Brussels. It doesn't seem to matter much where we go. But don't bother. It's all right. I'm glad to get away—anything's better than this."

There was something in the young man's tone that caused his uncle to look at him apprehensively. Frederick Kurt was really fond of his nephew. A lonely man and a bachelor, he had always regarded his brother's children as his own, and Richard was perhaps his favourite.

" You'd better stay another day or two. I should like to have a talk with you," he added. " Surely Elinor won't mind doing without you for a short time."

" Oh yes ; it isn't that. I should be very glad to talk with you, but I'm afraid it's not any good. You wouldn't see things as I do."

" Well, go and see your father now, and to-morrow come and see me before I go to the city. Good-night, Richard." He clinched this with his habitual advice : " Be a man ! "

Heavy at heart Richard walked into the library. His father sat at his writing-table, a packet of letters before him.

" Ah, Richard, come to say good-night ? "

The tone was quite amiable and natural. It was one of William Kurt's singular characteristics that he could, from one moment to the other, forget a scene or an annoyance and cease to suffer from its effects. Whether it was due to a natural buoyancy of disposition or whether to superficiality of emotion Richard could never determine. But over and over again he had experienced it, and never without admiration and envy ; admiration for what he regarded as magnanimity, envy of a nature that could so quickly outlive pain and put aside disagreeable recollections.

" I am very sorry," he said. " I didn't mean to lose my temper. It has been a trying day for us all, and when you spoke of the past I couldn't stand it." He longed intensely to unburden his heart to his father, to tell him something at least of the difficulties and troubles of his life, and he looked anxiously for some encouragement, some indication of sympathy.

His father gave no sign. His tone was quite kindly as he replied, but also quite cold. " My dear Richard, you will never make anything of your life till you learn to control yourself. Your habitual self-indulgence and weakness are your ruin. I shall say nothing more. I am glad you have expressed your regret. It may be some time before I see you again and I have one or two things to say to you. But please listen quietly—without excitement. For years, as you are aware, your mother's health gave constant cause for anxiety. It was, as you must know, on her account, and on her account only, that we have been in the habit of spending the winter out of England, and that in many ways our mode of living has been extremely expensive, more so than I can afford. For your mother I would have done far more. I would have spent all I had to preserve her life or to procure her happiness.

" But the reason for these sacrifices is now past. Henceforward I intend that we shall all live in a more regular and a more modest manner. I intend to give up the villa. In any case I could not bear to go there again. I have just been talking matters over with your uncle. He quite agrees with me. As soon as possible I intend to take your sister Ada abroad, perhaps to Egypt, very quietly, for the winter. During this time I hope you will give me some proof of your intention of changing your mode of existence. I prefer not to allude to Elinor, but I am conscious that it is largely thanks to her influence that you—— "

Richard broke in : " It's nothing to do with Elinor. It's entirely my fault. Why will you all put everything on her ? "

His father waited, looking down at the packet of letters.

" If you were to read these letters—letters from your mother to me during the last five years, you might perhaps

believe how much your unfortunate marriage affected her, how far Elinor contributed to sadden her remaining years, perhaps to shorten her life," Mr Kurt held up his hand deprecatingly as Richard rose with a gesture of passionate distress. " Please calm yourself. I do not say this to pain you. I believe you feel your mother's death deeply, that you would gladly atone for all the sorrow your follies—to use a mild expression—caused her, but it is my duty to urge upon you before it is too late the necessity for you to exert your willpower and turn your back in the future on the pernicious surroundings which Elinor's vanity and your own folly cause you to regard as suitable. It is my duty, I say, to warn you that, unless you change your manner of life, I shall be compelled to take steps which I should regret. If by your own industry and capacity you succeed in making an income sufficient to enable you to indulge all her and your extravagances I shall have no right to say anything, though I should deplore an existence spent in—in "—he could not find the exact expression—" licentious enjoyment."

" I don't know what you mean by licentious enjoyment." Richard tried not to sneer. He was thinking of his father standing with a rouleau of banknotes in his hand by the side of the roulette table.

" I repeat," continued his father, roused by Richard's dissent to satisfaction with the strong expression, " licentious enjoyment. Be that as it may, I don't intend to provide you with the means to idle in wasteful luxury and extravagance at my expense. You have now the chance of turning over a new leaf. You have a settled income, sufficient, and more than sufficient, to enable you to live like a gentleman. There is no lack of opportunities for a young man of your intelligence to earn more money if you desire it. It is not for me to suggest what you are to do. Later on, if you give me cause to believe that you really mean to live respectably, I may be justified in considering what further steps I can take. For the future it depends upon you."

As Richard sat listening he watched his father, trying to observe in the delivery of what seemed a long and pompous harangue some sign of feeling, some indication of underlying

earnestness. It seemed to him it would have been easy to compress the meaning into fewer words.

"I quite understand," he said. "Is there anything more?" His heart had hardened within him. "Because I want to leave to-morrow."

"May I ask where you intend going?" His father's tone betrayed an assumed indifference. It was on the tip of Richard's lips to substitute Paris for the less compromising capital.

"Oh, we're going to meet in Brussels. After that I don't know. We may remain there some time, it all depends."

"Brussels?" His father was considering. "Well, one can live very agreeably in Brussels at moderate expense. I'm sure Mrs Williamson will assist you to find a suitable residence and our friends the Lavelages will be pleased to see you if you call on them. Monsieur Lavelage is a prominent banker there; you might do worse than ask him to help you."

"Thanks. I'll remember them. Good-night, father."

His father turned to his desk again.

"Good-night, Richard. But remember that in all cities there are temptations."

CHAPTER II

i

A YEAR had passed.

Ada Kurt met Richard at Nice station and drove him to the villa. Motor cars had not yet ruined one of the most beautiful roads in Europe, and he drank in the harmony of silver-grey and blue, of soft chrome and creamy white. Mountain and sky, dusty road, stone parapet and sea, entranced him with their symphony of colour ; brown-faced Italian muleteers, cursing their half-starved mules, seemed to be acting parts in a chorus. A sudden stoppage. He had arrived.

Ada confirmed his anticipation that his father would not return from Monte Carlo until dinner-time, which heightened his appreciation of his sister's welcome.

Little seemed to be changed in the sitting-room he knew so well. The villa, originally taken furnished fifteen years earlier, was neither large nor luxurious. Mrs Kurt had desired to preserve its character of rusticity, and, though it had been modernised, the slowness of the process had caused a gradual and mellowing transition. But Richard noticed that the significant touch was lacking. There was an indefinable absence of the appropriate note in the placing of furniture, in the disposal of flower vases, in the very atmosphere of the room, that chilled him.

" I'll go into the garden," he said to his sisters, who were taking their tea.

Under the trees the past came back to him. It was as though his mother's spirit lingered in the spot ; he felt her presence as when, years ago, he had first come there. He recalled it all so clearly. He had often longed to go and stay with his mother, but the estrangement caused by Elinor's quarrel with her had added fuel to the dull glow of his father's

prejudice. In those days business kept Mr Kurt in London, and his visits to the villa were only occasional, but he had always objected to his son going there, and when, finally, Richard's mother insisted on seeing him, his father had had no share in the invitation. Every detail of that visit had been photographed on his mind. The fog and dreariness of London left behind, and he had come to her here, sitting under the trees. The dog at her feet had bounded forward barking, then welcomed him with wagging tail, and he, gulping down the sob of joy that choked him, had run towards her as she bent to him a face prematurely lined beneath the whitened hair. Near by a white cockatoo on a perch displayed his yellow ruff, and cawed at him as he kissed his mother and told her of his happiness at coming. He had drawn up a chair and sat with her in the glorious sunshine. That picture was framed in his mind against the background of the blue sea he gazed at now.

As he sat again in that self-same spot, with incredible vividness his life unrolled itself, step by step and link by link. It all seemed as yesterday ; his brief childhood, his school-days, his youth, his marriage and her death. And through it all there loomed the sombre figure of his father, ever standing between him and his mother, robbing him of his birthright of happiness. Even as a boy his holidays had been ruined by his constant fear of his father, incensed by bad reports, and, as he grew older, he had been shifted from school to tutors, and thence abroad, where he had remained until home ceased to exist. With the increasing wealth of the Kurt firm, and the period of social expansion, came his more complete estrangement from his mother. Then followed his departure to America, and Richard's memory dwelt with an almost morbid persistence on his father's encouragement of his uncle's proposal at a time when he had supposed he was going to Oxford. He remembered that this had been his mother's wish, and what especially crowned the bitterness of his memory was his belief that his father had traded on his youthful longing for change and adventure by leaving the choice to him. Was it not that his father had only needed this opportunity to evade his responsibilities and free

himself from his son's embarrassing presence? Relentlessly his memory carried him on to his hasty, but irretrievable, marriage from which his immature mind expected the affection he had been denied at home. His return with Elinor had opened his eyes to the change that had taken place in his parents' mode of existence, and he had felt himself more than ever cut off. What wonder that Elinor's bitter disappointment displayed itself in resentment? Did she not have constantly before her eyes the lavish establishment, with its stream of entertainments, the luxurious travelling with maids and footmen, the costly suites in hotels at fashionable resorts? Had his father supposed that, in settling them in an obscure part of Kensington, they would hear nothing of his Monte Carlo existence? Had he supposed that he had so effectually secured Richard's exclusion from family concerns that his sisters would tell him nothing? Had there been at the bottom of his father's treatment of him an unavowed desire to hide his own self-indulgence and love of luxury while he condemned these in his son with such self-righteous warmth? Richard's mother always seemed to him lifted above the ordinary; a larger, finer individuality than that of other women. He contrasted her bold nature, firm and unchanging, with his father's, which was so vacillating and weak. He knew his mother had been merciless towards Elinor, he had defended his wife and would always have done so. That was his duty, and Elinor would have been defenceless without him, but he understood his mother and he knew that she had loved him. While life lasted he would remember her and honour her memory. He was proud to be her son but he felt no pride in being his father's. Richard knew that his mother had suffered through him, and that she alone realised that his father's prejudice against him was the underlying tragedy of his life. With his whole soul he pitied her, for, though no one but he had read the secret, she died conscious that her husband's heart was hardened against the son she might have saved and did not, through hatred of his wife.

It was well that his reverie should be disturbed. Olivia came running out to him.

" I couldn't stand leaving you alone, old boy. It's so jolly having you here. Ada doesn't bother much about me, and I have to go for horrible walks with Miss Green, while she goes out bicycling or meeting friends. Thank God, I shall be out next year."

As she spoke there was the sound of a carriage coming down the drive.

" I suppose that's the Governor," said Richard.

" It's very early," Olivia replied. " He never gets back till the last moment before dinner."

Richard didn't reply, but sat watching the opening between the shrubs, with his arm round Olivia's waist. He had purposely abstained from inquiries about his father in order to seem neither captious nor indiscreet ; he intended to do all in his power to be conciliatory, to give no offence by word or gesture. A Monte Carlo victoria with two long-tailed white ponies drew up quickly, and Mr Kurt descended, with the active, nervous movement that was characteristic of him.

ii

Richard scanned his father's face as he went to meet him. Much depended, he thought, upon the way in which he was received, and upon the first impression he gave. He noticed that his father's hair and beard had grown whiter and that he looked tanned.

" How are you, Richard—all right ? " The words were off-hand and cool but the tone was not unkind.

" I hope I did right in coming without a definite invitation. I wanted to see you. I hope you're well."

Olivia kissed her father as he handed a louis to the Italian driver.

" Am I to come as usual this evening ? " asked the latter.

Mr Kurt shook his head, and Richard, catching the question, thought a shade of annoyance passed over his father's face.

" Am I in time for tea, Olivia ? "

" Oh yes, papa. Ada is still in the drawing-room. Richard's only been here a few minutes."

" Your train must have been late." Mr Kurt had a knowledge of the hours of arrival and departure of trains which seemed instinctive, and Richard was accustomed to being expected to master the time-table with exactitude. Nevertheless he answered haphazard :

" Oh yes, about half-an-hour."

" Then you would have been here at four. The train must have been at least an hour and a half behind time."

Insignificant details such as these served to accentuate the discomfort Richard felt in his father's company. Such experiences recurred at every meeting ; also he never knew how to address Mr Kurt. He had given up calling him " Papa " when he went to his public school. " Pater " had followed, used sparingly. For some years he had adopted " the Governor " in referring to him, but he was at a loss in addressing him direct. This caused his manner to appear colder and more distant than he intended. " How can one get on terms with one's father when one doesn't know what to call him ? " he often thought. He felt uneasy and self-conscious in his father's presence. He seemed to be aware that his bearing, his general appearance, his clothes, were under criticism. By nature unobtrusive and gentle, his father's manner somehow changed him ; in his dislike of appearing to cringe he felt himself becoming self-assertive, almost defiant.

Ada expressed surprise at the early return of her father.

" How have the tables been treating you ? "

Mr Kurt glanced towards his son and shrugged his shoulders. " No luck."

Ada pursued the subject. She liked definiteness, also she was interested in gambling. " Let's have a look at the *tire-lire*," she said.

Mr Kurt betrayed irritation. " Never mind the *tire-lire*, Ada. I'm tired. Let me have my tea."

The *tire-lire* was a pocket money-box used by habitual gamblers to mitigate their daily losses. Out of every winning *coup* a louis was supposed to be dropped into it. If conscien-

tiously persisted in the sum at the end of the day would be considerable and sometimes balance losses.

Richard half expected, when tea was finished, that his father would want to speak to him, but, though relieved, he was a little surprised when Mr Kurt and Ada sat down to a game of bezique. He knew his father's restless nature, and his incapacity for sustained attention. Mr Kurt could never read anything except newspapers without going to sleep, and Monte Carlo increased his habitual dislike of general conversation. Richard had never conversed with his father in his life ; any attempt had always begun and ended by his being talked at, and he had long ago learnt that it was wiser to keep his opinions on men and things to himself, as any difference from his father's views led to curt contradiction. Both men had quick tempers and Richard knew that if he lost his the consequences were invariably disagreeable.

He enjoyed the next two hours chatting with Olivia, who gave him accounts of her school in Dresden. He noticed her ripening beauty, wondering what sort of man she would marry. He augured little advantage to her future prospects in the atmosphere of Monte Carlo.

It was not until the gong reminded them of the dressing-hour that Mr Kurt and his daughter rose from their game.

Richard was going to his room when his father called to him : " I would like a word with you, Richard."

Richard followed him into his dressing-room, thinking how characteristic it was of him to delay talking till that inconvenient moment.

Deliberately and methodically Mr Kurt drew forth the contents of his pocket : cigarette-case, gold match-box, watch, coins, the queer leather gold-cornered and initialled letter-case containing the neatly folded packet of letters that it was his custom to carry till answered. Then came the *tire-lire* rattling with coins, finally his loose cash. This was carefully stacked according to denomination and placed beside the other articles on the side of the dressing-table.

With meticulous nicety Mr Kurt next opened the letter-case and withdrew from it two bank-notes for a thousand francs each.

" I don't like you to be out of pocket, Richard, in coming to see me and your sisters. This will pay your expenses. I need hardly warn you that Monte Carlo is a dangerous place. I cannot forbid you to gamble, nor expect you not to, as in this respect I give you a bad example. But I advise you to be careful."

Richard lingered, wanting to express his appreciation of his father's thoughtfulness. He recognised that the gift and the advice were well meant. He was trying to find a suitable expression when Mr Kurt broke in upon his intention.

" It's nearly dinner-time ; you'd better hurry up and dress."

Richard left the room without saying anything.

iii

It was somewhat past the dinner-hour when Richard reached the drawing-room. He expected his father to be irritated by his lateness, but the words that caught his ear as he entered the room relieved him.

" *Huit-onze* and the *transversales*, the old game, Ada. I tried it three times, then stopped to watch. Up it came. And then —what do you think ? " He spoke eagerly and excitedly, as though something extraordinary had occurred, something altogether unusual and yet a thing to be anticipated as possible.

Ada's shrill response from behind the screen met Richard as he advanced into the room : " *Dix-sept*, of course."

" Yes, *dix-sept*, *vingt-et-un*, *trente-six*, and I not on one of them."

" It served you right for not playing your game."

Hastily, almost breathlessly, Mr Kurt agreed with his daughter. " Quite true, Ada, so it did ; and of course, after that, I was hopelessly out of luck."

By this time Richard was close by. He bent to kiss Olivia, who was reading the paper, but his father, engrossed by his gambling experiences, did not notice him. He kept

repeating : " Just my luck—*dix-sept, vingt-et-un, trente-six*," till Olivia got up with a laugh.

" Bother your everlasting system, papa ; I'm hungry. Aren't you, Dick ? "

Mr Kurt, collecting his thoughts, rose, politely made way for his daughters and Miss Green, and they all proceeded to the dining-room.

At this, the first family meal he ever remembered taking without his mother's presence, Richard felt anew the void that she had left.

In London, as here, the almost painful constraint his father's presence caused had been compensated for by her stronger personality. He could still not make himself realise that she had gone for ever, and he glanced at his father, hoping for some sign of feeling, some evidence that he had been seared by the sorrow which he had led Richard to suppose lay so heavy upon him. But Mr Kurt laughed and chatted as much as he was capable of laughing and chatting. He had a kind of humour which was especially aroused by the foibles of others, and at the moment that Richard regarded him he was listening with amusement to something Olivia was telling him about an acquaintance. Richard noted an irritable reference to the extravagance of the *chef*. This brought down upon him the wrath of Ada, who had undertaken the housekeeping and who had no fear of expressing her resentment at any criticism.

" I hate waste, Ada," he said.

" You needn't be afraid, papa, it won't be wasted. The servants will eat it."

" But I don't approve of my servants eating luxuries."

Olivia caught Richard's eye and winked ; he smiled back, knowing what the grimace implied. But there was no laughter in his heart.

Dinner finished, they went into the drawing-room. Mr Kurt proposed music. Olivia went to the piano and played a nocturne of Chopin.

There was in her playing a pretence to virtuosity at which Richard's taste rebelled. But his father, settling himself for a nap, called for more.

Wandering towards Ada, hidden by an embroidery frame, he tried to penetrate the mystery of the amorphous pattern which was gradually evolving.

"Where did you get that design, Ada?"

"I got it with the work. It's an Italian thing from the Royal School of Art."

Richard felt sat upon and asked no more questions. His father slumbered in a deep arm-chair, emitting occasional short, sharp snores.

Richard was longing for an exchange of ideas. He wanted to talk to his sisters, but this was apparently not the occasion. He left the room, thinking the moment opportune to write to Elinor.

He went into the little red smoking-room at the back of the house. It looked bare and had that appearance of desertion that stamps itself upon any place which is unused.

On the mantelpiece was an old photograph of his mother.

He lit a cigarette and sitting down in an arm-chair before the empty fireplace rested his head on his hand and gave himself up to thought.

Was he, perhaps, too hard in his judgment of his father? It was not his fault that he had not the capacity of feeling. One was born with it or without it. Besides, his father did feel intensely for the moment, and even Richard could not deny the great loyalty and devotion, the complete consideration, he had shown for his wife during his entire married life. Upon his daughters his father had lavished affection; to them he had ever been indulgent, and Richard could find little return from them. Ada was inclined to be hard and was frequently rude to him, the well-springs of her heart seemed to have been exhausted by her fondness for her mother, to whom she had given the exclusive and jealous devotion of a strong and single-minded nature.

Olivia returned her father's half-playful gentleness with a pretty smile and an ingratiating phrase that delighted him, but Richard knew her feeling for her father did not go deep.

He fell to wondering how it was that he, who of all of them cared most for love, had had least of it. The figure of his father slumbering in the arm-chair, probably dreaming of

roulette numbers, came before his mind. No ; such a man could not feel, and such affection as he got was as much as he deserved. Richard finished his cigarette and went back to the drawing-room. His father and Ada were again playing bezique. He went and sat down by Olivia and conversed with her in low tones.

" The Governor doesn't give himself much time for thinking, does he ? "

" Perhaps he does not dare to."

Richard looked at his younger sister, wondering whether there was irony in the remark, but he did not reply.

The game dragged along its weary length, the slate being duly marked with winnings and losings. The winnings went, according to rule, into a money-box devoted to a charity in which Mrs Kurt had taken an interest.

Mr Kurt drank a lemon squash, then rang the bell for the servants to put out the lights and close the house for the night.

" Good-night, Richard. I suppose you don't want to sit up."

" Come into my room before you go to bed, Dick." Ada yawned the words.

Richard drank a stiff whisky-and-soda and followed his sisters up the stairs.

iv

" Have you got any plans for to-morrow, Richard ? "

Ada's maid was removing her dress as she stood yawning in front of the glass.

Contemplating her small features Richard thought she looked too old for her age. Her eyes were heavily underlined ; the effect of undue maturity was heightened by too free use of cosmetics.

" None, dear. Why ? Got anything on ? "

" Nothing special. But I want to go in to Nice by myself for the afternoon, and I don't want to tell the others. I thought, if you didn't mind coming with me, there'd be an excuse."

" Oh, certainly. I'll say anything you like ; but, if I'm not indiscreet, why the mystery ? Surely you can go to Nice when you like ? "

" Of course I can, but I hate answering questions, and if I say I want to go alone there'll be no end of them. You know how papa cross-examines one."

" But he'll do it just as much if I go with you."

" No, he won't if you say we're going to tea with friends of yours."

" Oh, all right, Ada dear ; by all means. Anything else ? "

" No, nothing. We'll take the two-o'clock train. But just tell Olivia you want me to go alone with you because of your friends."

Richard kissed his sister good-night, and was going to his room when Olivia called him. She was undressed and jumped into bed as he entered.

" I say, old boy, do come and talk. It's like old times when you used to come into my room and jaw. One can't talk when the Governor's there, and there are lots of things I want to tell you."

" Fire ahead, dear. I'm listening."

" I say, Dick, Ada's making an awful fool of herself."

" Really ! How ? "

" You remember George Ellis ? "

" Yes."

" She's mad about him."

" Mad about George Ellis ? That cad ? "

" Cad, if you like, but he's awfully clever, and he fascinates her."

" He may be clever. He can quote poetry by the yard, and he's got a very deep voice and an immense assurance. Over and above that he's an unscrupulous blackguard. What can she see in him ? "

" Heaven knows. But he sees something in her. It's my belief he gets money out of her."

" It seems incredible. Does the Governor know ? Has he any idea ? "

" The thing began last winter, while mother was so ill. The Governor was too much occupied with her to notice what

Ada did. This year he's always at Monte Carlo. He is often out to lunch and nearly always to dinner. Ada makes all sorts of excuses. She tries to keep it dark from me, but I know she is always meeting him. She runs after him, and he lets her."

Richard found it difficult to control his feelings.

George Ellis was one of those notorious mysteries who flash upon a public which has gradually allowed its moral sensibility to be dulled by a sensational Press. A strong and unscrupulous intelligence revealed itself in the articles on every kind of subject that streamed from his facile pen. Without principle or conviction, his alert mind and prodigious memory were at the service of journals which flourish by means of the false standards of taste they foster. George Ellis's earliest claims to intellectual recognition were based upon a hypothetical acquaintance with a man of letters of world-wide celebrity. The famous man had barely been laid to rest when his penultimate, and hitherto unrevealed, utterances were edited by George Ellis and published by Mr Prothero as authentic *ipsissima verba*. These were duly heralded as a revelation by those journals that made use of Ellis, and their readers, accustomed to adopt the opinions of their favourite newspapers, thenceforth regarded George Ellis as a rising star.

This was the man, Richard now learnt, who was selected by his sister as the object of her affections.

CHAPTER III

i

Richard bade Olivia an uneasy good-night. The reflections induced by her information kept him long awake. He lay smoking cigarette after cigarette, and, though he finally decided to speak to Ada at the first opportunity, he had little hope of persuading her to break off an intrigue which, however pernicious, was of her own deliberate choosing.

If he endeavoured to point out to her the certain injury to her reputation of such an infatuation, and the blind alley into which it must lead, he knew that she would dismiss these warnings with indifference and retaliate with pointed allusions to his own record.

To speak to his father would involve treachery to Ada, the idea of which he brushed aside, though he might have risked her resentment in her own interests. But he was conscious that his father would be unlikely to thank him for disclosing a situation the urgency of which he either did not realise or preferred to ignore.

Besides, he knew that his sister's stubbornness was equalled by her dogged loyalty. The death of her mother had deprived her of the chief object of her affections and had indirectly caused an attachment which their father's passion for play had given her the opportunity to cultivate.

Richard's bedroom window looked on to the terrace and beyond it to the sea. The following morning broke glorious, and, had his mind been tranquil, he would have drunk in the sunny radiance of the scene with delight. The smell of the carnations reached him from the thickly planted beds below, and as he gazed down he caught sight of his father in pyjamas and dressing-suit bending down to examine the blooms. He

seemed to revel in the scent of each flower, secured by its network of string with the meticulous care habitual in the South.

It was Mr Kurt's practice to rise early, however late his overnight return, and he never missed walking round the garden before breakfast, inspecting the beds and giving directions to the gardener.

Breakfast was taken in the *loggia*, which occupied the entire front of the villa. This was its most attractive feature, well adapted to a mild climate. Formed by pillars with glass partitions, it faced the garden, to which the entrance was wide and open. On the one side, where Mr Kurt's writing-table was placed, it looked towards the sea. Furnished simply with comfortable divans and easy-chairs upholstered in red linen, its only decorations were tall palms and large vases of flowers. An ideal place, it always seemed to Richard, to read or write or think in. But none of the family apparently considered it so. Life at the villa was always a rush.

Mr Kurt finished his breakfast quickly and went to his writing-table ; this was an unalterable habit. He never neglected anything.

It had been the brothers' invariable practice to write to each other daily when separated. William received constant telegrams from Frederick regarding their business, any matter of importance being telegraphed for the senior partner's information and approval. He looked over all the bills and accounts of his two establishments with the utmost minuteness, and like all men of large affairs had a considerable general correspondence, to which he promptly attended.

While he was thus engaged Ada called to him.

" Will you be home for lunch to-day, papa ? "

" I don't know. Does it much matter ? There's always enough for me."

Ada knew it irritated her father to ask him before Richard, so she persisted :

" I thought Richard might not be here either ; one likes to have some idea before giving the orders."

Richard had finished his breakfast and was reading the paper. Uncomfortable at the introduction of his name, he rose.

" Oh, I've no plans," he said, " except to go in to Nice with you, Ada."

Mr Kurt turned from his writing.

" Oh, if you are going in to Nice early, it's no use my being in to lunch. I'll lunch with the Andersons. They're at the Grand Hotel."

" Richard wants to go by the two-o'clock train ; we settled it last night. He wants to look up some friends."

" Does he ? " replied Mr Kurt dryly. He had always distrusted Richard's acquaintances.

Ada went off to give her orders. Olivia had disappeared. Mr Kurt went on writing. Richard pretended to read the paper, but was really waiting to see if his father showed any intention of speaking to him. After a few minutes that strained his patience without result, Richard threw aside the paper and lit a cigarette.

" I must write to Elinor," he said.

" You'll find paper and pens in the smoking-room," his father answered, but made no further comment.

This was the first time Elinor's name had been mentioned in the presence of his father since his arrival. Even in talking to his sisters only brief and superficial allusion had been made to her.

It was difficult for acquaintances of the Kurt family, unfamiliar with the facts, to grasp Richard's familial status. He was apparently regarded as a sort of fettered and inferior bachelor, and Elinor as one who had forfeited any rights to recognition. The impression thus conveyed was emphasised by the Kurts' *entourage*, and Richard, if he chanced to meet casually people his family knew, was accustomed to observe their surprise if he alluded to his wife.

The continual strain of this unnatural situation reacted, to Richard's detriment, on every fresh effort he made to reconstruct his life, and kept his mind in a constant state of resentment at the injustice done to Elinor.

In his anxiety to obviate inferences injurious to her reputation he anticipated them by telling people who knew his family that he was on bad terms with his father, and by so doing armed every malevolent gossip against himself.

Pursued by disagreeable reflections, yet anxious to save Elinor fresh cause for annoyance or dejection, he wrote her only a few lines and decided to telegraph for news of her health.

ii

" I say, Ada, don't think I want to pry into your affairs, but who are your friends in Nice ? "

" The Ellises."

Ada snapped out the reply. They were in the Nice train, and Richard's question, asked with much inward trepidation, was the fruit of resolution.

" You mean George Ellis and his wife, formerly Mrs Crawford ? "

" Yes. Have you any objection ? "

There was calculated acidity in the interrogation. Richard hesitated a moment, then answered :

" It's no affair of mine, Ada, and if Mrs Ellis is a friend of yours—— "

" Of course she's a friend of mine. We have known them for years. Mother was devoted to them. She loved George Ellis."

" As to that, you know better than I. I know he is clever, but he is very unscrupulous. He married his wife for her money, and neglects her."

" What do you know about it, pray ? And don't other men marry for money ? They're not all such fools as you. All men who succeed are called unscrupulous by those who fail."

Richard knew he was being baited and determined not to be annoyed.

" You've got that from George Ellis. I don't envy him his success, but I should not like anyone I am fond of to have much to do with him."

" What harm can George Ellis do to me, I'd like to know ? "

Ada did not look at Richard as she spoke. He knew she wanted to draw him, and he was not averse to being drawn. He intended to speak his mind.

" That depends upon how much you see of him. If you are a friend of Mrs Ellis, and see him with her, his acquaintance can't affect you, but if," Richard looked straight at his sister, " if you see him alone, and unknown to her, you will regret it. I know a good deal about George Ellis, and—— "

Ada broke in angrily: " You may have heard things about him, but that's not knowing him. I do, and I don't care a damn what malicious people say. Am I not entitled to have a friend? You seem to think that because I'm a girl I've got to live like a nun. It's absurd. What do you expect me to do? Down here for months—boring myself to death while papa gambles."

The combination of hasty defence and exculpation was not lost on Richard.

" I understand it must be dull for you, but how much do you see of him? "

" That's my business. Do I inquire into your affairs? What business is it of yours, I should like to know? You live your life. Leave me to live mine."

" Ada, dear, you can't think I mean to interfere with you except for your own sake. Do you think it's pleasant for me to talk to you in this way? "

" Well, don't, then. When I want your advice I'll come to you for it. We shall be at Nice in ten minutes. Take the first train back and don't trouble about me." Ada's voice became shriller. " Unless you'd like to speak to papa about it. That will be the next thing, I suppose."

Richard made up his mind to abandon his hopeless undertaking.

" No, Ada, I shall say nothing to the Governor, nor shall I mention the subject to you again. I daresay I'm a fool for saying anything. I meant it for the best. But I shan't leave you in the lurch. Where would you like me to meet you? "

" Oh, don't trouble, pray." Ada's tone was sarcastic but she was evidently mollified.

" Well, I shall be at Rumpelmeyer's at five, and won't go till you come. There's a train back at six-fifteen."

" Don't bother about Rumpelmeyer's. I'll meet you at the station."

Richard walked about Nice, feeling desolate and dispirited. He would have liked to clear out at once and go back to Biarritz, but he must have a talk with his father first. He wondered how long he would have to stay and whether anything would come of it. And Elinor—how was she getting on? He felt uneasy about her. Ought he to stay away from her? There should be an answer to his telegram on his return to the villa. If it wasn't satisfactory he'd leave at once. He must try to have it out with his father that evening after dinner. Would he get the chance?

Nice, though full of sunlit smiles and gay dresses, had no charm for him.

He turned in to the bar of the London House and drank a cocktail. At the station Ada arrived just as the train was starting, out of breath, disordered and cross.

iii

At the villa Richard found a telegram awaiting him :

" All right. Don't hurry back. Writing."

The relief this afforded enabled him to feel by no means ill-pleased when Ada told him that Mr Kurt would not be home for dinner.

" He telephoned to say he's dining with the Andersons," she said.

Ada had recovered her composure by the time she was dressed, and the dinner passed without incident. The meal finished, Richard suggested taking Ada in to Monte Carlo, but she excused herself.

" But you go, by all means. Don't take much money with you."

Olivia demurred to being left.

" You might stay with us. We never see anything of you Dick,"

" Give me this one evening off, Olivia. I must try my luck," he replied. " If I win I'll give you anything you like, but I shall only risk twenty louis, so I'm not likely to do much. Good-night, girls."

Luck was with Richard from the start. Playing carefully with five-franc pieces, his winnings mounted up until his original stake was multiplied by ten. He followed no system, but, on the contrary, neglected the gambler's maxim of playing up to his luck. He was determined to be prudent, and as his winnings were raked to him he carefully placed all the notes in his pocket. He continued to win steadily ; the notes had begun to fill his inside pocket as he stuffed them into it without counting them. He had no idea how much he had won, but felt he was now justified in playing in gold. Again he won, playing all the chances round certain numbers which he selected haphazard. Now he was playing maximums on the numbers and winning ; people were gathering round him watching ; the word went round that there was a big gambler at the table, and onlookers, attracted as they always are at Monte Carlo by any unusual luck, began to crowd him uncomfortably.

He resolved to play one more maximum and stop. He selected his father's numbers. " *Huit-onze, s'il vous plait, les carrés et les transversales, la couleur et manque.*" The stakes were duly placed, the change handed him. The ball spun round ; he had ceased to feel any excitement and was unconscious of the smallest feeling of pleasure when, after several abortive attempts on other numbers, the little ball rolled quietly into one of his. One of the croupiers, who had specially charged himself with looking after Richard, raked the mass of gold and notes towards him, asking : " *Et cette fois ?* "

" *Rien,*" said Richard quietly.

" Don't be such a fool. *Voilà, croupier.*" A hand thrust itself over Richard's shoulder containing a bundle of notes. " *Maximum pour la répétition.*"

Richard had a choking feeling as he recognised the voice.

His father stood beside him, his eyes blazing with excitement. Pressing his shoulder, he whispered hoarsely in

Richard's ear : " Go on, Richard, play it up ; back your luck. You must win. There—look at that ! "

The ball was back again, safe in "*huit.*" Mr Kurt had won his *répétition* ; the croupier was handing him the money. Richard longed to get away. He felt the incongruity of the situation, its ugliness impressed itself on him.

" I prefer to stop playing ; there are too many people," he whispered, and began to edge his way to the back.

" Well, wait for your money, then," Mr Kurt replied, pressing him back towards the table as he spoke. The croupier, laughing at Richard's inexperience, passed him over several handfuls of notes and coins. Richard had forgotten that, unless asked for, the original stake remains. He was utterly bewildered ; the ball was again rolling.

" *Onze* " this time. He and his father had won again, on their alternate number. Richard felt as if he had been caught in a trap ; he intensely wanted to go. The pressure of the people, the closeness of the atmosphere, the proximity of his father, whose manner betrayed unnatural and feverish agitation, utterly disquieted him. He received the money mechanically.

" I'll wait for the first losing *coup*," he said. But he had to wait. Time after time the ball spun round only to fall into one or other of the numbers controlled by the " *huit-onze transversale* " combination. He began mentally praying to lose. At last there was a change ; the *chef de partie* and his assistants rose, another lot of croupiers took their seats, a new hand threw the ball. At the first *coup* Mr Kurt's and his own stakes were swept away. Richard breathed a sigh of relief.

" Now I'm off, Governor. Let's go out into the air. Are you coming ? "

" All right, you go, Richard. I'm just going to try my usual game. *Dix-sept, vingt-et-un, trente-six.* What time is it ? " Mr Kurt's eyes were glued on the table, he had no time to look at his watch.

" Ten o'clock. I'll meet you in the atrium at a quarter past, and we'll drive home."

From a quarter past ten Richard wearily watched the clock

until eleven. At that hour the rooms, as he knew, closed. He had firmly made up his mind not to re-enter them. The crowd of gamblers and *flâneurs* began filing out, a motley crowd of every nationality, most of them looking gloomy and dejected. Occasionally one laughed boisterously. Richard noticed faces that seemed familiar to him from photographs in illustrated papers.

Richard caught his father's name. A stout, coarse woman, with a face flushed purple, passed him ; she was talking to her companion, a dapper-looking man in evening dress. Her voice was loud, vulgar, rasping.

" Old Kurt must have dropped a capful to-night, Jimmie."

" He's used to it, Duchess. Everyone knows the old chap here. He's in the rooms morning, noon and night. He'll be going upstairs afterwards."

Richard felt himself reddening ; these people didn't know him, of course, but it sickened him to hear them discussing his father. How he loathed the whole thing. Would his father never come ? As he walked slowly towards the entrance of the rooms the man at the door touched his cap. Mr Kurt passed through, his arms held behind him, his head slightly thrown back, his eyes on the ground, his chin with the red-white beard thrust forward in the habitual manner. Richard touched his arm. Mr Kurt looked up briskly and laughed shortly.

" Cleaned out, Richard. I've not got your luck. Let's go to the Café de Paris and have a drink."

iv

Seated together in the Café de Paris at Monte Carlo, there was more of comradeship at that moment between father and son than in all the years of Richard's past life.

This moment, destined to be marked out, if not as a turning point, at least as a finger-post in his existence, remained for Richard a vivid memory in subsequent years.

Mr Kurt's excitement had cooled, his manner became genial, jocular even. He was never put out by losing ; in

this sense he was "a good gambler." He treated roulette as a pastime, the only one that appealed to him, much as sportsmen regard racing. It was all in the day's work to lose; if he won, so much the better, but the game itself was the thing.

Generally considered a very rich man, William Kurt was rather a man who made a great deal of money. The Kurt business was of the most speculative kind, but the brothers, naturally acute, had so systematised their speculations, they had so studied markets, so trained themselves to observe and analyse fluctuations, they had been so tried in the fire of gambling experience, that, whether years were good or bad, the end of them invariably disclosed a large balance of profit.

Complete mutual confidence ruled them, while each was the complement of the other. William, prescient and with the wider range of mind, possessed the *flair*, the initiative for boldly premeditated operations, carried out sometimes in the face of adverse conditions. He had a powerful following in the city, and his advice and suggestion were eagerly sought by large capitalists.

Frederick, on the other hand, was the more skilful operator. He had the quick, alert mind that grasped instantly tendencies or features generally unobserved. Cool, determined, and with a will of iron, his mere personality influenced a market; when he bought, those who sold felt they did so at their peril. At the very beginning of their partnership an incident occurred which old members recounted as characteristic of the brothers Kurt.

It was at a time of panic. The Kurt firm had been dealing enormously, members with whom they had been trading became alarmed. They were suspected of over-speculation without the necessary resources. In spite of reports and rumours they continued their operations on an increasing scale. Finally the committee took action. William Kurt was called before them. The times were dangerous, he was told. In face of what they had heard as to the scale of his firm's operations the committee felt it to be their duty to ask him his position. Within an hour the books of the Kurt firm had been placed at the committee's disposal, the result made

known. The books had proved triumphantly that the credit of the firm was beyond suspicion.

" Waiter, a lemon squash. What will you have, Richard ? "

Richard felt exhausted. " A pint of champagne, please."

Mr Kurt's face showed disapproval.

" I'm awfully tired. You see, I'm not accustomed to luck," Richard said apologetically.

" Well, you did have a run, I must say. You must have won a lot."

" I suppose I must."

" But don't you know how much ? Haven't you counted your money ? "

" No."

" But, my dear boy, what folly ! You must. You want to know how you stand, don't you ? "

" There's no standing about it. I began with five hundred francs ; the rest are winnings."

" Well, let's count it now." Mr Kurt's austere and orderly mind asserted itself. " We'll go into a quiet corner."

" Oh, please wait till we get home, Governor. I don't like the idea of counting money here in this public place. What does it matter ? I've won a lot, and there it is—in my pocket. I'm glad, because I shall be able to pay up a lot of things and not bother you. Otherwise—— "

" Well, you do take it calmly. But that's good. That's the way to take it. You're not likely to have such luck again."

" I'm not going to play again. I've finished. I'm cured."

William Kurt looked at his son quizzically.

" Cured of gambling, eh ? Well, I hope you are, I hope you are. I should be very pleased. I sometimes feel that if you became a gambler it would be my fault."

Richard's feelings towards his father were warming under the influence of his friendly manner.

" Not at all, Governor. A man can't get out on someone else like that. But I've had a wonderful run of luck and I'm satisfied." He swallowed his glass of champagne and poured out another. " Aren't you tired ? "

Mr Kurt lit a cigarette. "I am, rather."

Richard thought he looked it, also that he looked old. His heart kindled towards him.

"We might be going, the drive in the cool air and the moonlight will be good for you, and you'll sleep."

Mr Kurt looked at his watch. "Eleven-thirty. We'll go at twelve. I told Francesco to be ready outside the front of the Casino. I'll just go and have one more try. But," he tapped his pocket, "there's no more left. I must borrow from you."

Richard's sense of physical exhaustion had been relieved by the champagne, but his father's weakness sickened him. He put his hand inside his coat and pulled out a bundle of notes, which he handed to his father. They were screwed up, and some of them were torn through being forced into his pocket. Mr Kurt took them and, smoothing them out carefully, began counting them. Richard meanwhile pulled out some more, emptying his pocket gradually.

"Ten, eleven, twelve, one, two, three," Mr Kurt counted methodically, placing the notes in separate heaps according to denomination. Richard noticed a group of waiters watching them with open-mouthed attention. Two women sat opposite glaring greedily at the money. Through the open window passers-by stared in.

"There's twenty-three thousand francs here, Richard. Have you any more?"

Richard knew that these were the contents of one inside pocket only, that the other was, if anything, fuller, and that he had stuffed notes into his waistcoat and trousers, which were disagreeably heavy with gold. But the thought that was uppermost in his mind at that moment was to get his father home, and he knew that, if luck went against him, he would want more money. He decided to lie.

"I don't think there's much more except some odd notes and gold."

"But you won three maximums running, Richard, *en plein*, and all the *carrés* and *transversales* and the even chances. You must have three times as much."

Mr Kurt was afraid Richard had had his pocket picked.

" Oh, did I ? Well, I've got it on me somewhere. You know it's yours if you want it."

Mr Kurt got up. " Oh, there's much more than I want here. I don't play in such sums. I'll keep it for you. Let's go across now."

Father and son walked across the *place*, followed by curious eyes.

At that time the comparative decency of the Blanc *régime* had already begun to yield to the avaracious demands of the Stock Company which had taken its place. The institution of the upstairs room opened when the public *salles* were closed at eleven to permit gamblers a further licence until two o'clock was then a novelty which shocked the older habitués. This room, unlike the *salles* below, resembled a common *tripot*. Though only large enough to contain two roulette-tables, it was not too small to contain a bar ; smoking, too, was permitted. Altogether an ingenious and considerate arrangement through which much grist came to the mill.

Richard sat on a high stool in front of the bar counter, while his father hovered about between him and one or other of the tables, upon both of which he was playing at the same time.

The room was not full. Even the most hardened gamblers generally find the twelve hours, during which the public rooms are open, long enough to win or lose in.

It was evident to Richard that the patrons of the so-called " *Cercle privé* " were nightbirds for whom no daylight responsibilities or other ties existed.

A fresh-looking young Englishman followed the game with anxious eyes, occasionally staking small amounts. Richard observed that he looked haggard through the sunburnt skin, and he felt sorry for him.

The others all appeared to be of that professional type to be seen in every Continental gambling-place. With the exception of the young Englishman they all seemed to know Mr Kurt, and occasionally addressed him with a sort of familiar deference.

Richard looked at his watch. It was already twelve. He had not noticed whether his father was winning or not, and

didn't like to disturb him. He went over to the table just as Mr Kurt handed the croupier a handful of gold. He watched the ball spin. His father had lost. Again and yet again the same. The time passed, it was half-past twelve. Still his father showed no sign of leaving. He held in his hands a sheaf of notes ; Richard watched it getting smaller. He noticed that his father's face had the flushed look, his eyes the unnatural brightness, he had previously observed. Mr Kurt came over to him. " Only ten *mille* notes left, Richard. Shall I make it sudden death ? "

" I should chuck it. You're not in luck. No use throwing good money after bad."

" I'll try one *coup* on black, then home if I lose."

Mr Kurt's manner was final and decided. He handed the croupier half his notes. Again the ball rattled over the turning board ; this time Mr Kurt won.

" I shall let my stake take its chance," he said.

Three times in succession Mr Kurt received five thousand francs. The fourth time he lost, and with a low, chuckling laugh he wished the company at the tables good evening.

Five minutes later father and son were bowling home behind the fast Italian ponies.

" Not so bad, Richard. The *tire-lire* is full. I must be nearly even on the day."

Richard did not answer. The sharp clicking rap of the ball, the monotonous refrain of the croupier were in his ears ; the vile effluvia of the *tripot* in his nostrils.

He gazed at the silent sea, rolling smoothly in the moonlight.

v

Richard awoke the following morning with no sense of exhilaration ; he had slept heavily the moment his head touched the pillow. Before going to bed he had requested his father not to tell his sisters any details about his gambling adventures, a request to which Mr Kurt had acceded without further comment than, " All right, Richard," accompanied by his characteristic short laugh. But Richard was assailed

with questions at breakfast and had to admit unusual luck. He did not get off easily.

" I can't see why you make such a mystery about it, Richard," said Ada ; while Olivia chimed in :

" I say, you might tell us. What do you say, papa ? "

Mr Kurt supported Richard. " We talk a great deal too much about the gambling. It's my fault. Richard had a good win, I am glad to say, and I hope he'll keep it. Now let's talk of something else. By the way, Ada, I asked the Andersons to lunch."

" And I've asked the Ellises and the Francillons," Ada replied.

Richard looked at his father, but Mr Kurt's expression did not change, and he made no remark. Evidently he had no misgivings on the subject of George Ellis.

Before leaving his bedroom Richard had counted his money. The notes he put in his pocket, the gold, of which there was a considerable amount, he decided to use.

When his sisters left the table Richard went over to his father, who had, as usual, started his writing. Drawing the package of notes from his pocket he laid it on the table.

" Can I interrupt you for a moment, Governor, while the girls are gone ? "

" Certainly, my boy," Mr Kurt replied, with unusual geniality. " How much is there here ? "

" Thirty-seven thousand francs."

" I thought you were mistaken last night, Richard."

" To tell you the truth, I knew there was more, but I thought it better for you not to be up so late, and I know how it is when one loses ; one always goes on as long as one has money."

Mr Kurt was silent a moment, a pleasant expression came over his features.

" Quite true, Richard, quite true ; that's why I never take much in with me. Very sensible of you not to give it to me."

His father's admission, though implying gratitude to him, gave Richard no satisfaction.

Mr Kurt counted the notes. " Quite correct, thirty-seven thousand exactly, and you gave me twenty-three, that makes

sixty thousand ; two thousand four hundred pounds. A very nice haul. What do you want to do with it ? "

" I thought perhaps you would get it sent to my bank in London, if you don't mind."

" Certainly, my boy. Here, let me see. Your bankers are—— ? "

Richard told him the name.

" I'll pay in a cheque to your account for the amount and keep the cash."

" Thanks very much, Governor."

Richard was surprised at the increasing ease he felt in his father's society. It was an entirely new sensation. The restraint seemed to be melting away almost imperceptibly. Would not this be a good moment to speak to his father about his future ? His mood might change. Richard hardly dared to hope that a lifetime of estrangement would vanish in a day through the magic of a successful gamble.

" When you've time, I'd like to talk to you about my plans," he began.

His father's face became serious ; the features contracted.

" By all means. I must finish these letters. In half-an-hour I shall be ready for you."

Half-an-hour later Richard joined his father in the garden. Mr Kurt held a letter in his hand.

" I've had a letter from your uncle. You know how great his interest in you is. He urges me to settle you, and says you have the idea of living in the country."

His uncle's letter had cleared the way for Richard.

" That is what we want," he replied.

His father considered a moment. " So far from objecting to such a course, I entirely approve it, but "—Mr Kurt hesitated, then continued—" what about Elinor ? She has so far not exhibited any particular liking for a quiet life."

Richard showed signs of discomfort.

" Don't think," his father went on, " that I mean to say anything unpleasant. On the contrary, it would be a great relief to me, a solution in fact of the difficulty I find myself in regarding you and—your wife, if you were to settle down in the country."

" I can only tell you, Governor, that I've talked it all over with Elinor, and she likes the idea. Of course, I don't say we should not want to go away and have a change now and then. What I want to do, if you approve, is to farm a bit, and so on."

Mr Kurt listened sympathetically. " But you know nothing about farming—one has to learn it. Now, if you said you would make a study of agriculture—— "

" I don't think I'm up to that, Governor, but I know something about horses, and, now I've got this little windfall, if I had a little more, I could easily find some way of doing the thing on business lines, find a sort of farming partner, or—— "

" I don't object to the idea, Richard ; not at all. In fact, if you really made up your mind to do it, and came to me with a carefully considered proposal, I should do my best to help you. But remember, Elinor must make up her mind to do her share ; she must——"

Richard, anxious to leave Elinor out of the discussion, broke in : " Please don't worry about Elinor, Governor. She'll help me, I know. I'm very grateful to you. It's a great relief to me. Now I can make my arrangements to return to Biarritz, and we'll go back to England as soon as possible. I shall start at once looking out for a place—a suitable place. It will take some little time."

" Oh, it can't be done in a hurry, Richard, of course. By the way, Sir Alfred Anderson is coming to lunch. He farms on a large scale. His advice might be helpful."

" Thanks, Governor, I'll speak to him. Anyhow, I feel I have something to look forward to now, and I'm awfully grateful to you." Richard's face and manner bore out his words ; he held out his hand. Father and son were nearer to each other at that moment than in all their lives before.

For the first time within his recollection Richard had left his father with agreeable impressions. Though the change in his prospects, which the last twenty-four hours had effected, was startling, he had no difficulty in realising it. His father and he had at last met on a common ground. The mysterious workings of fate had discovered for him the hidden path to a

sympathy till then withheld. Experience had at least taught him life's essential mutability, and that the basis of sound judgment lay in recognising the diversity of points of view.

In the light of this new understanding with his father he had acquired the key to the hitherto unexplainable barrier between them. The antithesis of their temperaments remained, but its nature stood revealed and defined. It was as logical that a successful man should respect success as that a gambler should venerate luck.

It was not, Richard felt, that his father's ethical standard was inferior to his own ; indeed Mr Kurt's integrity would be proof against temptation to which he himself might yield. It was in the conception of life and its meaning that the two were so entirely divided.

Richard could not decide if it was by instinct that his father's code of conduct demanded tangible factors, but he knew that the intrinsic principle of his valuation required property as a standard. Mr Kurt could not understand or recognise qualities that were outside material influences. Richard, on the other hand, though fully conscious of how far his conduct and actions fell short of his ideals, felt within himself aspirations which had no relation to material achievement and were independent of worldly censure or approval.

CHAPTER IV

i

FIVE years had passed, marking another stage in Richard's career. Had he needed proof of his own weakness, instability and lack of will-power, these foolish, wasted years would have testified convincingly enough. And they had flown by with appalling speed.

Was he the richer for the experience? It did not seem so; yet they had their house in the country, horses, and a flat in town besides, which Richard had persuaded his uncle to furnish.

He had hunted, but his enjoyment of sport had long ago become mechanical, and his country establishment a source of boredom. But if looking after, and keeping up, the whole paraphernalia were a wearisome strain, the exactions of the world which Elinor and his pastimes combined to procure for him had become intolerable. Certain things were the right things to do; certain people were the right people to know; certain words were the right words to use; and, worst of all, certain thoughts were the right thoughts to think. Alone he would have been indifferent to the penalties incurred by the infringement of these rules; but the life he led involved his acceptance of an inequitable partnership which Elinor directed. Disagreement with her on any of these cardinal rules of their set always led to complication and discomfort disproportionate to the benefits obtained, and Richard found that external acquiescence in her formula secured him at least a measure of personal tranquillity. Early in their loveless, childless married life he had learned the futility of opposing himself to the manner of existence on which the whole of Elinor's obstinate will, the whole of her shallow mind, was fixed. There had been moments of tension, crises, when he

had protested, even put his foot down ; but as time passed he realised that interference demanded a moral attitude to which he could not lay claim and to which he no longer dared to aspire.

So far as he could judge, his wife was by nature too cold, too self-interested, too calculating, ever to go to extreme lengths. He hardly knew whether he would care now if she had or if she did, but his self-respect would not admit the rôle of a complacent husband, and, though in such a case he would have treated her with generosity, he would have had no scruples against exacting his freedom.

When they arrived at Taormina in December he had the firm intention of reconstituting himself, of proving to himself that he was, after all, capable of something better than idle drifting. And he intended to do this in spite of Elinor, who had always sneered at what she called his " intellectual aspirations." Was there anything he ever did or said that she didn't sneer at ? So he had brought with him books, which he promptly unpacked. And this was about as far as he got. Innumerable impediments, of which the impossibility of serious reading or thinking in close proximity to Elinor was the chief, came between him and his purpose. Soon his reading, fitful and desultory from the beginning, ceased almost entirely, and, like the other parasites, he spent his days picking up bargains in " antiques," a form of artistic interest which appealed to Elinor. They took various trips to Palermo, Catania, Girgenti and other places, which, if adding little to Richard's knowledge of art and history, increased their collection of bric-à-brac. Meanwhile, too, Elinor had succeeded in attracting the male escort, to which she was accustomed, from Naples, Rome and even more distant places, and the couple resumed the relationship, and reacquired the atmosphere, which their joint experience of married life led them to regard as normal.

Richard once more accepted his fate, less submissively, perhaps, but with comparative equanimity. Once more he was, on the whole, doing what Elinor wanted him to do ; he was living as Elinor wanted him to live, and he was very nearly thinking as Elinor wanted him to think.

The so-called "season" was at its height when Mary Mackintyre and her friend appeared, and Richard had immediately courted acquaintance with these two women who stood completely apart from the vapid amusements of the place. Richard soon learnt that both had recently graduated at Vassar, and were travelling together for a few weeks until Miss Forbes went home to take up a professorship.

They were convinced and ardent socialists of an advanced type, and had, it was clear, lived among, and with, the working class in New York and other American cities. They were steeped in all the Socialist doctrines, from Lassalle and Marx to Jaures, for whom Miss Mackintyre professed an unqualified admiration. Richard had always had vague literary ambitions, which he generally concealed, though they would flash out on the rare occasions that he met anyone with tastes in that direction. It was, therefore, natural enough that he sought the society of Miss Mackintye and her friend, finding in their earnest speech and sincere attitude towards life relief from the tawdry unrealities of the pseudo-artists and dilettanti who formed the society of Taormina. In the couple of weeks that followed first acquaintance he lost no opportunity of being with them and accompanying them on long walks and excursions. Sometimes Miss Forbes had work which kept her in the hotel, so that Richard was thrown with Mary Mackintyre. Her intelligence was keen without being brilliant. She had more aspiration than accomplishment. Intellectually minded without being profound, she was inclined to be priggish. But her companionship was a tonic for Richard, who needed the spur of sustained argument to concentrate his attention. Discussion with her quickened and developed his dormant mental energies, broadened and invigorated his imaginative outlook. Almost unconsciously he was beginning to discover himself. This eager, inquiring American woman was reopening his eyes to his waste of life, and to all life might hold for him if he could but seize it. She provided the stimulant of a personality that was vigorous to the point of aggressiveness, and it helped to revive in him a

tiny measure of the self-confidence undermined for so long by the merciless flail of Elinor's biting tongue. Was it, he began to think, after all, not too late to do something worth doing? Mary Mackintyre's enthusiasm for social democracy was infectious. Supposing he were to devote himself to it also? It was not altogether a new idea with him. He had always been inclined to take the part of the under dog, and now there was a good chance for him to learn something about the whole matter. He found scope for his kindling energies in the mere thought. To his questions she answered encouragingly, if with a note of pedantry that always seemed to underlie her words. It was as though she wished to impress him with the stern professionalism of her knowledge. The young woman enjoyed her mental patronage of the older man, whose natural gifts were, she well knew, far superior to her own, while to him her tone implied a sort of intellectual adoption which he rather welcomed. It betokened interest in what he did, and Richard was almost pathetically in need of support. How indispensable to his altered moral condition this support was he only realised when Miss Mackintyre one day suddenly announced her impending departure with Miss Forbes for Assisi.

He had contemplated securing opportunities for closer acquaintance during an indefinite period, and the reflection that, when they left, he would be thrown back upon the society of Elinor and the Anglo-American colony gave him the measure of what he was losing.

"Then I shall go there."

The ladies exchanged a smile.

"And your wife, Mr Kurt? You know you dare not go off and leave her here alone."

There was, Richard knew, a challenge in the statement.

"I shall go to Assisi."

"And brave the consequences? Bold man."

"Why do you laugh at me? It's so easy, and it doesn't help."

Miss Mackintyre sat upright in her deck-chair. Her action was almost violent, so that the sun-shield fell back with a snap.

"Help? Who can help a slave who hugs his chains?

How can you let a woman, who is your wife, speak to you as she does—look at you as she does? Are you a man? Answer me now, are you a man?" She beat with her hand upon the arm of her chair as she spoke. The rasping, staccato words seemed to come from her involuntarily, as though they had been held back until then, but could be no longer.

Richard was for a moment surprised into embarrassment. They were in a corner of the old monastery garden, quite hidden by trees; through the pendulous boughs of the plane-tree beneath which they were seated he could see figures and hear voices. It was nearing the tea hour, and tables were laid here and there in hotel fashion. They were perhaps within earshot of some of his own acquaintances, possibly even of Elinor herself.

Was he a man?

He had no desire to evade the question, but he had no answer ready. The insistent grey eyes remained fixed upon him a moment longer, then Mary Mackintyre dropped back in her chair with a laugh.

"I don't suppose you've been spoken to like that before. I think I ought to apologise. I've been unpardonably rude—in fact, insulting."

"You may not believe it, but I like the truth." He smiled. "It's a good thing I do, for I get plenty of it."

"I shouldn't have thought so. From whom?"

Involuntarily Richard looked behind him nervously before he answered. "From my wife, of course."

"Apparently you consider——" Without finishing the sentence, Miss Mackintyre rose with a gesture of impatience. Gathering up a book and some writing materials from a table beside her, she moved towards the path leading to the hotel.

"You're going without giving me a chance of answering you." Richard was walking by her side and spoke in a low tone. Why did she attack him in this direct way? Ought he to be feeling offended? Ought he to have a dignified reply at the end of his tongue?

As they reached the hotel entrance Miss Mackintyre stood still a moment to let someone pass out, and Richard looked up.

Elinor, her nose in the air, and, as usual, dressed to perfection, swept by them, followed closely by a tall, thin man with a pronounced stoop. So far from bowing or nodding, she looked neither to right nor to left, but held on her course like a cutter in full sail before the wind.

Richard took in the scene.

Miss Mackintyre was dressed in some light material, and her tall, spare figure was silhouetted against the darkened interior of the hotel as she gazed after Mrs Kurt. There was amusement mingled with scorn in her eyes as Richard caught their gaze returning to him.

" Now I shall certainly go to Assisi." He lit a cigarette self-consciously as he spoke and Miss Mackintyre smiled.

" I should if I were you," she said.

iii

Elinor made no scene when her husband announced that he was leaving for Assisi. For this he had no doubt to thank a fancy-dress dance about to be given at the villa of an artist.

" Are you accompanying your new intellectual friends ? " Her tone was meant to be cuttingly sarcastic.

" I hope so."

" And afterwards ? "

" That will depend upon how I like Assisi. You're comfortable here, aren't you ? "

Elinor looked at her husband in surprise. " Do you intend to leave me alone indefinitely, then ? " Richard not immediately answering, she continued : " Because, if so, I have plans of my own."

Richard did not inquire what the plans were. He was curious to know, but he felt that not asking gave him a certain advantage—the advantage, at least, of an indifference which he meant her to interpret as new-found strength.

They parted the following day in the same humour, each feeling that there was something behind the other's unexpressed purpose of future intentions.

Actually Richard did not even travel with Miss Mackintyre and her friend. The ladies had decided—Richard did not know whether the decision in any way concerned him—to spend a day and a night at Messina on their way, and it was not until twenty-four hours after he had established himself at the Hotel Subasio that he received the following :—

" Grand Hotel de Perugia.

" Dear Mr Kurt,—We decided to stay at Perugia instead of at Assisi. It suits Jane Forbes better, being handier for travelling, and, as you know, she leaves me next week. Do come over to see us whenever you like. You can telephone, so that we may not miss you. Yours sincerely,

" Mary Mackintyre."

This was in the nature of a cold douche for Richard, who wondered if the excuse of Miss Forbes' convenience was disingenuous. Was his new experiment going to turn out a mistake ?

Assisi was very wonderful, and Giotto exceedingly interesting, but he had not come there specially to study art.

A week or two of this glorious springtime in Umbria, perhaps, then on to Florence or Venice, finally to Paris, where she would introduce him to Jaures and her circle of socialist intellectuals. Elinor was not out of the scheme, nor was she exactly in it. There would be time to consider her, and he would confide in Mary Mackintyre and seek her advice. Plenty of men he knew lived in a state of friendly separation from their wives for months at a time. Why not he ? Anyhow, there was no urgency in the matter. Elinor had plans of her own, she had said. He would wait till he heard what they were.

But the essential part, the groundwork, of this loosely knit scheme was Mary Mackintyre herself.

V

It was arranged that on a certain day Mary Mackintyre should come over to Assisi by the early train and they should visit the *carcere* together. This would give him a welcome opportunity to lay bare to her some of the thoughts in his mind.

Richard met her at the station with a rucksack on his back, containing their lunch, which was to be taken in the open. After the first greeting they walked on together, hardly speaking. His heart was full of the joy of life. Their path lay through the fields, and larks rose carolling from their very feet. Here and there he waved his hand genially as they passed a peasant at work, or he would call her attention to some special feature of the landscape.

It was one of those moments when the world is full of music, and Richard, responsive to every influence, longed for a voice that he might burst into song.

"Do you love music?" he asked.

"Oh yes, of course I do."

Her answer sounded perfunctory to him.

"I mean, do you feel the necessity of it to express things for you sometimes? Do you get a nostalgia for it as I do, as I do now, this moment?"

He watched her clear-cut, regular profile as he spoke. She did not look at him. She wore a plain straw hat, quite becoming, which showed her dark hair, smooth and glossy, above her ears. She dressed very plainly but neatly, in a style suited to her figure, which was that of a slight, well-proportioned youth rather than a young woman. She might have been twenty-six, but her breast was undeveloped and her flanks were narrow.

"I try to restrain desires I'm unable to gratify. Why cultivate emotions? Why be so intense?" She spoke as though she had been nettled by his question, as though it had perhaps suggested that his power of feeling was deeper than her own.

"You may be right, but one can't help feeling them, can one? I seem to have to live, consciously, I mean, every

moment, there's nothing voluntary about it. Will seems to have nothing to say in the matter."

" Because you do not exercise it ? "

He looked at her again, without answering. Was she annoyed with him about something else this morning ? Her expression had not changed, but now she felt his eyes upon her, and turning her face towards him with a smile :

" I should like you to develop your will for your own sake. Without it you cannot do a man's work, you cannot stand alone."

" Why insist on my being lonely ? "

" I don't insist ; your life insists, and your wife. Besides, a man who counts is always lonely."

Richard became thoughtful.

" What counts for you ? "

" Effort, work, achievement."

" Only that ? "

She evaded direct reply.

" What else ? " she asked.

Richard stood still. They were upon an eminence. Just below them the old oratory and the wood where St Francis fed his little brothers, the birds, were wrapped in a dreamy haze, and at his companion's feet a clump of poppies lifted their vivid heads.

" What matters most to me," he said, " is to feel. If it isn't actual knowing, it's a large part of it. And the more conscious you are the more you feel. After that comes expression. I suppose that's why I'm so fond of music ; it does the work for me."

She did not answer, and they descended to the *carcere.*

vi

It was on their road back that she told him of her decision to join her mother in Rome when Miss Forbes left.

At first he hardly took in the significance of the announcement. At worst he had imagined that he would be able to join her again, and he began instantly adjusting his mind to

the factor of a mother whose existence until then had been unknown to him.

" You'll allow me to come on there presently, won't you ? "

She hesitated a moment, and when she spoke it was with evident embarrassment. " I'm afraid not. You see, my mother is old-fashioned ; she might not understand our friendship. She is old, too ; it might upset her."

" Yes, I see," was all he could say, and the bitterness in his voice was unmistakable. For some moments there was silence.

" You know I told you you must stand alone." Her voice was unusually soft ; there was almost a break in it.

" You said that to-day, yes. But I hadn't imagined—it was very stupid, of course—that you were going to leave me —abandon me—just as I'm beginning to—— " Richard broke off. A latent sense of dignity prevented him from confessing on the spot his dependence on her.

For the first time in their acquaintance, Mary Mackintyre became a woman. With an impulsive movement she laid her hand upon his arm.

" I'm your friend, Richard Kurt. I would help you if I could. But it's better for you, for us both, perhaps, that I should go now. Do you not know it is ? "

" For you, perhaps—not for me. I'm not a man who counts. I'm lonely—damnably, horribly lonely. I need help ; I need someone who understands."

She showed discomfort at the repetition of her phrase. She slipped her arm under his and walked on so with him, her long legs keeping step with him as he strode on, with his eyes on the ground.

" Is there no one you can fall back on ? You've never told me if your parents live, or if you have sisters—brothers."

" My mother is dead ; my father is alive. I don't think we understand each other. My sisters—I'm very fond of them, but they aren't any use. They're married ; they've got their own lives to live, and—— "

An hour later Richard Kurt bade Mary Mackintyre farewell.

As he walked back to the hotel from the station he asked himself what he should do next. One thing he certainly

would not do, and that was return to Taormina. He was completely at a " loose end." Women were strange creatures. She had said he could write to her, as if that were any good. What he needed was companionship, someone he could talk to, develop ideas with. Mary Mackintyre was certainly priggish, narrow-minded in a way ; one side of her mind seemed to be unsusceptible to influence, blocked, as it were. But she was a treasure compared to most women. She wasn't a sham, she really cared for and had aroused in him the love of things of the mind. If he never saw her again he would be grateful to her for that, even if it stopped there, as it probably would. And he was shockingly ignorant. He had everything to learn. How could he begin at his age ? Alone, too. If he could be with other people who were working it would be different. But he knew no such people. All the friends he had—and what friends !—were idlers.

CHAPTER V

i

CHANCE ordained the selection of Richard's immediate objective. A lady seated next to him at the Subasio dinner-table on the evening he parted from Mary Mackintyre mentioned Drina among the places she had recently visited. She spoke of it as a resort comparatively little frequented, the new hotel built by an Englishman having been only quite recently finished. Richard did not know the Lake of Como. Why not there as well as anywhere else? he thought. He did not greatly care where he went, so long as he could, by hook or by crook, protract the period during which he could remain alone and think. Drina sounded, at all events, hopefully unfashionable, and Elinor was unlikely to join him sooner than she could help. They had a fairly large circle of Italian acquaintances; races were coming on, he knew, at Naples, where, too, she would be likely to meet English friends homeward bound from Egypt, while both Rome and Florence offered social inducements sufficient to detain her at least some weeks. Elinor would be likely to cling as long as she could to those places "where one ought to be," or where one could be excused for being at that time of year. Her mysterious plans centred, no doubt, in one or the other of these places, which it was, therefore, the height of Richard's immediate ambition to avoid.

Before going to bed to wrote to Elinor:

"I have decided to go on to Drina. I don't know much about it except that it's a quiet little place on the Lake of Como, and I'm told there's a decent hotel called the Bellevue. You can write your 'plans' to me there. Mine are to remain there until

it suits you to join me. It might be a good idea to take a furnished villa somewhere on the lake for the summer—much cheaper and more comfortable than hotels. Write and tell me what you think, and I'll have a look round," and so on.

Two evenings later he was sitting on the hotel terrace. The night was cloudless, and the moon came slowly into view above the distant Bergamasque Alps, touching the dark heights with pale lustre as it gradually rose. Now the wooded headland hiding Traverso came into view, now the opposite shore with its gardens to the lake-side, until at last the water below was of rippling silver. The beams, piercing the shadows, revealed new beauties, and, weaving the boughs and leaves into strange and lovely patterns, bathed him, the terrace where he sat, and all around him, in a flood of liquid light.

The magic of the moment entered into Richard's soul. The spell of one of the most beautiful spots on earth was upon him.

ii

Richard rose early the next morning, refreshed, and, to his own surprise, in buoyant spirits. He felt a new energy and a ready-made determination to react against despondency and disappointment. Was this new vigour induced by the beauty of his surroundings? He was, he knew, subject to such influences, and yet the loveliness of the scene the night before had made him melancholy, and when fatigue finally drove him to bed he had lain awake long, while the moonlight played upon the ceiling and his brain worked like a machine, everything he desired to forget crowding into his mind. The last thing he remembered before he fell asleep had been his disappointment with Mary Mackintyre. And yet she was not the first woman whose life had mingled with his own for a while, only to pass out of it again. He was not, he never had been, for one instant in love with her. There was about her a physical aridity which, corresponding with her hard, precise mentality, entirely excluded love.

She was like other American women of a different stamp, though similarly actuated by conflicting ideas of freedom and convention. It was a strange kind of emancipation, Richard thought, that was governed by a mother in the background emerging only at crises!—a mother ignored in theory, but who in practice disposed apparently not inconsiderably of her daughter's liberties.

Mary Mackintyre certainly had been helpful to him. She had roused him at all events from listless indifference to everything. She had done more. She was the only woman who had ever said to his face what she thought of his wife. Some people would call it bad form, and abuse her for it, they would probably take Elinor's part against him and say that, whatever her faults were, he was to blame.

But why did Mary Mackintyre, having gone so far, having, as she knew, kindled in him a new desire to do something worth doing, having talked as freely as she had with him about outworn codes of morality, and said in so many words that he ought to cut loose, why did she then, as it were, leave him to his fate? She could not have been afraid of caring for him herself. Her attitude had been too superior for that. A woman of her stamp surely could not love a man she thought a poor thing. She had asked him, was he a man? He had often asked himself that question. It was no wonder she did. Still that made it clear that it was not for any reason of sentiment she had left him in the lurch. Anyhow, it was over now, and he had learnt a lesson from the experience. No woman was any use to him unless she loved him, and he meant to secure love somehow. He wanted it badly. He would not go on living without it. If he could fall in love himself, so much the better. It wasn't easy for him. He had lived too hard, he had suffered too much, he had too few illusions. But, if he ever did, Elinor should not stand in the way. Love was the only thing in the world that mattered. Achievement—pah! Let it go hang!

Richard Kurt crossed the road behind the hotel and walked, whistling, up the mountain path.

" Taci ! "

Richard heard the voice without distinguishing the word and stood still to listen. Where did it come from ? He had climbed, perhaps, five or six hundred feet, and had reached a kind of rocky plateau almost level and covered with short grass. Over the edge of this space, and below him, he could see a bend in the highroad beyond which, hidden by trees, lay the hotel, and beyond that again the lake shimmered in the early sun, hardly risen above the mountains.

The path he was following continued upwards between rocks, a tempting path ; higher up there must be a glorious view. How beautiful it was ! A sigh of satisfaction escaped him. He turned and began climbing again ; he was full of energy. The blood seemed to be coursing through his body ; he wanted to use his lungs, to pant for breath and feel his heart beat fast. And as he walked swiftly on he began whistling again from pure joy.

" Tu-taci ! "

This time he caught the words, which were not shouted, but intoned. It was a young man's voice. Evidently the words were addressed to him. He was disturbing someone by his whistling. But who and where was he ?

Richard retraced his steps to the little plateau he had just left and stood looking to right and left, above, below. Suddenly he perceived that, at the edge of the grassy level, the rocks broke away abruptly, and, throwing himself on the sward, he peered over. Immediately under him, ceilinged, as it were, by the rocks upon which he was lying, was a space a few feet square carpeted with moss. Upon this a young man was stretched at full length on his back, gazing up at him. By his side lay an open book.

" Ebbene ? "

The boy, for he was little more, regarded Richard lazily through half-closed eyes.

" I'm not Italian. I'm afraid I disturbed you."

" Not Italian and up before six ! But, of course, I ought to have known. No Italian would whistle *Rigoletto* wrong."

He opened his eyes wider, shielding them with one hand. "I say, come down here. I can't talk like this. Your face is upside down and makes me giddy."

"Supposing you tell me how to get there."

"Go back whence you came fifty yards. First to the right. When you get to the jumping-off place, take off your boots and hang on by your eyebrows. It's only a fifty-foot drop if you slip."

"Thanks. Any other instructions?"

"No—at least, the next time you whistle '*La donna e mobile*' remember that it goes—La, la, la, lalala, not la, la, la, la, lalala. If you must whistle, whistle correctly, but it's a beastly habit."

The humour of the situation, as he lay on his stomach, craning over the edge of the small precipice, conversing with an unknown and impertinent youth below, suddenly struck Richard, and he laughed aloud.

The boy waited gravely till the other's mirth had passed.

"I'm supposed to be funny, I believe. I don't know why. My temperament is tragic. I'm quite misunderstood."

"Were you ever at a Public School?"

"Oh yes. Eton. I was sacked, thank goodness. That's why I'm here. Aren't you glad?"

"I don't know. Why were you sacked?"

"Because I preferred writing verses to playing games, and because I refused to go to chapel. Do you like games?"

"Not much. I used to think I did. Now they rather bore me."

"And you're English? Wonderful!"

"Was that your only crime at Eton?"

"Really, I never knew. They said I was abnormal."

"Who said so?"

"My house-master. The old man thinks so too."

"Who's the old man?"

"My parent, Lord Wensleydale, the place they make cheeses at."

Richard began to take stock of the youth. He was, beyond question, remarkably good-looking, tall and grace-

fully built. His skin was like a girl's, and his hair parted from his forehead in two thick golden-bronze waves.

Apparently he had thrown on loose flannels over his pyjamas. The striped silk shirt was open at the neck, and he wore white Basque shoes on his sockless feet.

" I'm hungry. You can't have breakfasted either. Let's have something to eat."

The boy jumped to his feet, putting the small volume in his pocket. There was a scrambling sound, and a flash of light-blue emerged on the path beyond.

" That's a secluded *cache* of yours," Richard said, coming up with him. They were descending the path, the boy leading. Presently he turned off to the left, and Richard stopped.

" I leave you here, don't I ? It's straight on to the hotel ?"

" Yes ; but I never breakfast there. You'd better not either. The coffee's undrinkable, and you'll see Barnes and his wife."

" Who are they ? "

" I don't know, but he's an awful cad. He wears red socks, and his hands are never clean, and she—oh, Lord ! "

Richard followed him. A moment later they reached the road a few hundred yards beyond the hotel and, crossing it, came to a narrow cobbled *calle*. This led tortuously between high and ancient walls with many windows, where multi-coloured garments swung listlessly from the tiny ports. On the far side of the quay, close to the primitive stone pier which served the lake steamers, stood a white-walled inn. In front of it, under a yellow awning, were placed little marble-topped tables and chairs. At one of these they seated themselves and, at the boy's cry of " *Padrone !* " a stout, brown-skinned man in an apron appeared, bearing a bowl of rich curdling cream which he placed on the table with a hearty " Good morning, gentlemen."

The youth gave his order and the stout person immediately disappeared within.

" What delicious cream ! "

" From the *latteria* over there." The boy waved his arm in the direction of the lake. " Francesco, my boatman, brings

it fresh every morning. By the way, my name is Brendon—Reggie Brendon. What's yours ? "

" Richard Kurt."

" Kurt, Kurt. I seem to know the name." Reggie Brendon's eyes travelled up and down Richard's person, examining him. " You look English and yet not quite. Your moustache isn't like a tooth-brush, it curls up ; and your eyes are responsive like a woman's. They haven't got that cold look. And they're too intelligent to be really English."

" When you've done analysing my features—— "

" I haven't done yet, not quite. I'm thinking—— "

" Think as we walk. I want to go back to the hotel for my letters."

" Letters ! I never get any, thank goodness, and I never write any either."

They had reached the hotel and Richard was about to say good-bye when his companion ejaculated : " Did you see that ? "

" Did I see what ? "

" Those ghastly people. They waddled off the terrace with the dignity of elderly ducks. They regard me, I may tell you, as a moral leper, and you were intended to observe their departure as a protest against my contaminating presence."

" Indeed. Why ? "

" I don't know. They're sure to tell you as soon as they get a chance. They'll consider it their duty to warn you. You'd better make the most of me while you're still ignorant of my true character. I specially want you to spend all to-day with me. Please lunch at my table, and let me row you across to Ravolta and show you the Prince's garden. They'll be so fearfully annoyed."

" Your reason for wanting my company is not exactly flattering."

" I know ; but you've got to see the places about here and all that, and my boat's awfully comfortable. Besides, I can be charming when I like. This afternoon I shall like."

" That's very good of you. The only thing is, I'm not quite sure about myself. I'm rather changeable. At the present

moment the prospect of going with you is agreeable, but later I might prefer, let us say, a quiet game of bridge with Mr and Mrs Barnes."

Reggie Brendon turned and, putting his hand on the older man's shoulder, gazed into his eyes.

" You don't mean that ; you couldn't do it."

" Why not ? "

" They're fearful people. Would you believe, that horrible, goggle-eyed woman had the impertinence to come up and ask me if my mother wasn't the sister of the Earl of Oare, because a friend of hers had been staying at Belsham. Wasn't the world a small place ? I said : ' Very. Was your friend housekeeper, cook or still-room maid ? ' "

" I'm not surprised they don't love you."

" Thank heaven, no. But do say you'll come with me this afternoon."

" Very well, on one condition."

" Granted beforehand. Name it."

" That I lunch by myself, at my own table."

" I say, I love that. I've taught you to be rude."

" Don't be too pleased. You may be sorry some day."

iv

Richard ate a hurried meal and went out, discovering a winding path leading from the main terrace to a lower one, whence steps descended to the water. There he found a convenient wicker chair under a tree and opened a book.

But his attention wandered, the charm of his surroundings took possession of him, and he lay back in hazy contentment. There was just enough breeze to rustle the leaves and to scatter the blossom of some shrub which filled the air with its scent. Innumerable insects hummed, and he fell into that state between sleeping and waking in which he felt, rather than saw, the light and colour of lake and mountain, sky and cloud.

" Hulloa there ! "

Richard roused himself and looked towards the voice. A

boat covered with a green awning was close to the steps below him. On the stone-paved jetty stood Reggie Brendon, arrayed in a suit of tussore silk.

What the boy called " rowing him over " Richard discovered to mean sitting luxuriously next to himself in the other cushioned corner of the stern, while two lusty Comascos, in white duck trousers with red sashes and red ribands round their wide-brimmed straw hats, rowed them with long, easy strokes across the lake.

" What were you reading ? "

Richard handed the boy his book.

" Do you read much ? "

" By fits and starts. I've reached a point where books don't help me."

" That's the point I started from and I've never got away from it. I only read poetry. I hate prose ; it's practical. I feel life entirely emotionally, in fact I'm amoral."

" What do you mean by amoral ? "

" I don't believe in rules of conduct ; I make my own. That's why my late lamented house-master got me sacked. He said I was a poisonous influence among his dear little boys. That is also why his lordship calls me abnormal, which, of course, I am, but not because I don't conform to his idiotic standard of middle-class Philistinism. I never can think why my mother married such an absurd person. She is beautiful and charming."

v

The rowers shipped their oars. The boat glided softly under a bridge into a narrow channel bordered by shrubs to the water's edge, and, aided by an occasional push from a boat-hook, ran smoothly alongside a wooden landing-stage covered with brown matting.

A man in a boatman's white suit, with a wide straw hat, on the black riband of which " Villa Carlotta " and a crown were stamped in gold lettering, stepped forward and helped them to land.

The Prince was in the garden, he believed.

" I expect we shall find him in the pergola. He always has tea served there when it's fine. We'll take this path." Reggie Brendon showed the way. " You'll find the Prince delightful ; not at all German. But, then, his mother was Italian, so is his wife. Not that she affects him much. They're never together. She's in Paris with Carlo Bassi. The Prince loves Carlo Bassi. He's got the most perfect taste in the world."

" Do you mean because he loves Carlo Bassi ? "

" Not only for that, though it is the height of good taste to feel affectionately towards your wife's lover. I don't know Bassi, but his sonnets are exquisite. The Prince had them bound by Dupont and illustrated by Boecklin. He's a great patron of artists and he loves music. He's got a priceless collection of old masters at Hohenthal, and he's a musician, a painter, and I don't know what else himself."

Three people were sitting within the rose-covered pergola ; one of them rose and came towards them.

" I've brought a friend with me, Helmuth—Richard Kurt."

Prince Helmuth von Hohenthal was tall and unusually handsome ; he wore a small pointed beard and had a distinctive elegance of mien and gesture. He spoke English with a slight and agreeable accent that was certainly not German, nor was it Italian—an accent that was, perhaps, the result of speaking several languages with equal ease.

Richard was expressing his admiration of the place.

" But what is such a garden compared to your English ones ? There are no gardens like them. Here one does one's best, but we lack the humidity. There is no grass, and what is so beautiful as your old lawns ? No garden is complete without one."

" Evidently you know England well."

" I used to. My paternal grandmother was English, and my father was ambassador to the Court of St James's for some years, and always kept up the connection. But I no longer go there."

There was regret under the words.

Behind the group was a table laid with cups of blue Sèvres, glass and silver.

" Mrs Rafferty, Conte di Foligno, Mr Kurt. Do sit here beside Mrs Rafferty."

" I know what you'll have, Reggie."

The boy took a deep silver dish full of strawberries from the table and walked off with it.

" It's dreadful to be the victim of one's appetite, isn't it, Mrs Rafferty? Resistance involves such awful moral suffering."

Reggie sat down cross-legged on a large cushion with the dish beside him and a plate heaped with sugar in his lap.

" I don't know about the moral suffering, strawberries give me gout," Mrs Rafferty replied.

Richard was looking at her. She might have been any age over fifty. Her features were well modelled and, though her face was a maze of tiny wrinkles, the skin was pale and delicate. Her hair was grey and gold, fine and beautifully arranged.

" I'm so sorry, I mean glad," from Reggie.

" Are you a resident in these parts or a visitor, Mrs Rafferty? " Richard asked.

" I've lived on the lake for the last five years, and I hope to die here. I've been everywhere. It's my final anchorage."

" I wish I thought it was mine." It was the Prince who spoke.

" It is flattering to us Italians to hear you speak like that. Madame Rafferty from the distant Pacific, you, Prince, from your magnificent castle in Thuringia, both agree that you love best our little lake."

Count de Foligno spoke French, occasionally using words in his own tongue.

" We find, I think Mrs Rafferty will agree, something besides beauty here, Conte "—the Prince turned towards the Italian—" that we cannot find in our own countries, and that thing is priceless. Some of us—I think Mrs Rafferty will allow me to include her amongst us—like to think and say what we please, which is the same, or nearly the same, as doing what we please. It is this, the complement of beauty

of scene, that attracts us and keeps us. Am I right, Mrs Rafferty?"

As Richard looked at her a faint and barely perceptible flush now seemed to dye for an instant the pallor of her face.

"You have said exactly what I feel, Prince. That is why I came, and that is why I shall stay."

"That for us is the great thing." Foligno bowed with gallantry to the lady. "For the rest, it is still more of a compliment that you find something even better than beauty here."

Foligno was a Milanese. He had recently returned to his home on leave from the Embassy in Paris, where he was First Secretary. He gave Richard an impression of hardness and of falseness. There was no assumption of intellectual authority about the Prince. His manner, far from being superior, was, if anything, slightly deprecating, as of one anxious not in any way to lay down the law. Perhaps for that reason even a listener as frivolous as Reggie accorded him deference.

"You wouldn't go so far as to say that one cannot express one's own opinions freely in London or Paris or Berlin? Is it not simply a question of choosing your company?" Richard addressed his question to the Prince.

"Some of us are perhaps unfortunate in that respect, Mr Kurt. We are placed by circumstances, not to our making, in a situation where choice of surroundings is nearly impossible. One is perhaps the victim of what is regarded, properly on the whole, as one's good fortune. One is a marked person, so to speak, of whom certain things are expected, such as duties and opinions. One may be temperamentally unsuited to undertake the duties, and one may be intellectually unable to profess the opinions. Mrs Rafferty, for instance, has told me that she was expected to entertain San Franciscan society. She felt unequal to it, and, having the privilege of knowing her, I am not surprised."

The Prince turned to Foligno and asked him what was going on in Paris.

Beyond a few trite and superficial observations on the theatres, little was forthcoming of interest to the Prince. So much Richard could effectively judge from the latter's elo-

quent silence, while the Milanese, serenely unconscious of the boredom he was inflicting on the personage he was obviously seeking to impress, continued in a thin, irritating voice to instruct his hearers in the gossip of what he called *le monde*. He was eloquent about the doings of a Milanese *marchesa*, whose affair with a Florentine *littérateur* was, he said, the most entertaining scandal of the moment, and he seemed especially well informed as to the value of the pearls the lady had sacrificed on the altar of her passion.

" And all went, every centime, in one night at the Épatants. Now both are *complêtement décavés*."

Foligno could tell the Prince nothing about what was going on in the world of Art. He was, he said, a " sportsman." The Concours Hippique and the races were more in his line. He certainly had a wonderful memory for names and figures, for he mentioned numbers of horses and women, and easily recalled the sums that had been won, lost and spent on, or with, them by American and other millionaires.

" Are you related to a Mr Kurt who married a Miss Colhouse of Baltimore ? " Mrs Rafferty asked Richard bluntly, as she rose to go.

" I am that Mr Kurt."

" Ah ! " She looked at him hard. Richard knew she had placed him, and wondered what " Ah ! " implied. " You must come and see me. I live at Trino. Reggie will bring you. Is Mrs Kurt here ? "

" No. I'm expecting her, though, before long."

" You'll bring her, of course."

Richard bowed.

Reggie and Foligno were waiting for them at a bridge over the torrent from which steps descended, making a short cut to the landing-stage. Here the Prince bade Mrs Rafferty and the Conte good-bye. Richard held out his hand and the Prince took it, but held it an instant, detaining him. " Won't you stay a little longer ? I would like to show you my house."

Reggie was saying good-bye effusively to Mrs Rafferty. She took his arm. " I want you to come and see me off."

" Down all those steps and up again ? " he replied, looking back at the Prince and Richard.

The music-room was the largest in the villa, running the whole length of the house on the south side, with large windows opening on to a balcony above the loggia. Formal, decorated in the style of Louis Quatorze, and rarely used, its spaciousness and heavy gilding restrained, rather than stimulated, conversation.

" My wife designed and furnished this room. This portrait, as you see, has been framed to be placed where it is." As he spoke he took from the top of a writing-table of marquetry a frame with gilt-bronze handles and mounts on the graceful curved legs. It was of gold overlaid with pale shades of enamel, a small coat-of-arms and crown were delicately inlaid above, and the name, " Franz Johann Eberhard von Hohenthal," with date below ; altogether a good example of skilful modern craftsmanship of the expensive sort. The portrait showed a young man of perhaps two or three and twenty, in an attitude which displayed to advantage his well-made clothes. Rather good-looking, Richard thought, but not remarkable. It was signed " Jean."

" Do you see any resemblance to me ? " Hohenthal asked, as Richard, after studying the photograph as long and carefully as consideration for the father's feelings demanded, returned it.

" No, I don't think so."

" He is said to be the image of his mother."

It suddenly occurred to Richard that Hohenthal had never mentioned his wife's name until they entered the drawing-room on this occasion.

" Indeed ! Have you a photograph of the Princess ? "

" I'm sorry to say, no. She refuses to be photographed. I have only a small miniature here, which I will show you another time. It does not do her justice, nor does the portrait by Boldini at Hohenthal. She is very remarkable-looking. I hope you will know her before long. Don't you think my son looks English ? He was at Eton."

" He has the English cut," Richard remarked.

" My desire in sending him to an English Public School was twofold—that he should be able to look at his country with English eyes, and that he should not grow up a *dilettante*.

There is no future for a *dilettante* in modern Europe, and I don't want him to suffer more than necessary for the sins of his father. In England love of sport at least kills *dilettantism* in young men."

"Does it? I wonder!" Richard answered. He left the Prince with the photograph still in his hand.

vi

While he was at the Villa Carlotta a storm had gathered, and Reggie had meanwhile disappeared. The Prince placed his motor-launch at his guest's disposal, and, as Richard stepped into it, there was a growl of thunder; he was glad of the cosy protection of the little cabin when heavy drops began to fall. By the time he reached the Drina shore the rain was coming down in torrents, and he ran quickly up the shortest and steepest path. The couple of hundred yards sufficed to drench his thin flannels, and he went straight to his quarters adjoining the hotel, passing quickly through the sitting-room to the bedroom beyond to change his clothes. It was only after he had dressed that he noticed, lying on the writing-table, a pencilled note on a sheet of his own writing-paper. To his amazement it was from Elinor.

"*Arrived in motor with Ugo Baltazzo. Am leaving this in case I miss you when you come in. Just going out in a boat with a charming young man who says he's a friend of yours.—E.*"

"How like her!" Richard involuntarily uttered the exclamation aloud.

It was still raining, though softly now, and wondering whether Elinor and the boy, for it could only be he, had been caught in the storm, Richard threw on a mackintosh and made his way to the hotel from the dependence where he had his rooms.

There she was on a sofa in the lounge, in an evening dress, covered with some sort of iridescent trimming which reflected in changing colours the shaded electric light above her head.

On one side of her sat the bent and elongated figure of Baltazzo, surmounted by his shiny bald pate and bristling grizzled moustache, his face wearing an expression of sulky irritation ; on the other Reggie, who was evidently telling her something funny, for both were convulsed with merriment. All three were smoking cigarettes, Elinor holding hers to her mouth in a jewelled amber tube with fingers on which rings sparkled.

None of them noticed Richard till he stood before them and taking his wife's hand raised it to his lips.

" I'm glad you escaped the storm, dear."

" So'm I," Reggie interrupted.

" I'm so sorry I wasn't here when you arrived."

" I'm not," from Reggie.

" You ought to have wired."

" I meant to, but we didn't know we should get here this evening. Angela came as far as Milan " (Richard did not know who Angela was), " and I really intended to stay the night there and come here by the lake steamer to-morrow, but Ugo told me how lovely the road was, so we decided to come on, and here I am."

A gong sounded, the dinner signal.

The boy had had a table prepared in the middle of the dining-room, conspicuous, even before their arrival, with a huge glass bowl full of choicest roses.

" How lovely ! " Elinor exclaimed.

Reggie ordered champagne. He was determined nothing should be wanting that could contribute to the success of the occasion. The appearance of an exceedingly smart and pretty woman was not only a desirable fillip to his zest for novelty, but also afforded him a much-relished opportunity for showing off. If there was one thing he loved more than any other, it was to be seen with a really well-dressed woman, and Elinor had a positive genius for self-adornment.

Elinor found this atmosphere entirely to her liking. With an admirer on either side, she was in high good humour, and Baltazzo, who had a weakness for alcohol, cheered up after his second glass of champagne and became, for him, quite boisterous. As a rule he was almost inarticulate.

This Baltazzo was an extraordinarily stupid man of about fifty, a bachelor and very well off. He was a Milanese, but had practically given up Milan for Paris, where he had a flat in the Champs Elysées, only coming to Italy in the autumn, which he generally spent at his villa at Casabianca. The Kurts had first met him at Monte Carlo, and there had been between Elinor and himself a flirtatious understanding of an apparently passive kind which never seemed to get beyond its preliminary stage. He generally turned up at times and places convenient to Elinor, and had, in keeping with this practice, put in an appearance at Taormina, when, some weeks before Richard left for Assisi, his wife had begun to feel a hankering for change, and consequently the need of a reliable and (financially) substantial escort for future reference. Dullness and dumbness were not, in Elinor's view, defects in an elderly admirer of lavish propensities. He had a large Mercedes car, which he placed at her disposal, just as in Paris he asked her and her friends to any restaurant or theatre she selected, and Richard, though he detested an obligation, accepted it as the only alternative to scenes repeated each time he opposed acceptance.

It was in keeping with the Kurts' marital relations at this stage that no question had been asked by the one, nor explanation vouchsafed by the other, as to Elinor's experiences from the time that Richard had left Taormina down to her meeting with Reggie. Richard accepted the situation. It seemed the only thing to do. And both of them, had they said what they felt, would have confessed to equal relief that the presence of outsiders made it necessary to postpone discussion of their private affairs.

The boy kept things going.

He held forth about the delights of the lake, painting in glowing colours those attractions which he intuitively felt would appeal to the woman beside him.

Elinor plied him with questions, much to the jealous annoyance of Baltazzo, who, having known the neighbourhood all his life, considered himself a better authority. Which was the most fashionable part of the lake? When was the season? Who was who at Traverso, Ravolta, Como?

Argument became lively between her neighbours on each point in turn. Baltazzo nebulously maintained the supremacy of Como, where half the aristocracy of Milan had villas, while Reggie championed the loftier social level of the Traverso end. Quality appeared, certainly, Elinor thought, to favour Traverso and Ravolta, with a Roman prince and a German highness respectively, but, on the other hand, there was a luxuriance of counts at the other end as well as a Milanese duke.

There followed a discussion of hotels, which weighed down the scale heavily on the Como side, when Baltazzo dropped Casabianca and its autumn season into the balance. Reggie's confession that he had never seen the lake in the autumn confirmed Elinor's choice.

" Then you don't know Lake Como," Baltazzo retorted. " Casabianca is the centre of society. Everyone goes there from the Engadine in September. It's a little Deauville, with horse-races, yacht-races, dinner-parties and dances. There is even soon to be a casino."

Richard took no part in the discussion, which was of a type but too familiar to him. Also he saw quite plainly that Elinor, as usual, was exposing her own weakness and that Reggie was amusing himself by drawing her.

Presently Mrs Rafferty's name cropped up. Baltazzo evidently wished to convey to Elinor that he could say a good deal about that lady if he chose, and Elinor wanted him to choose.

" Well, what about her, Ugo? Why don't you say? What's the mystery? "

Baltazzo looked round as though fearing to be overheard.

" *C'est une vicieuse,*" he muttered under his breath in his neighbour's ear.

Elinor's French was anything but fluent.

" Well, go on," she exclaimed in English.

Baltazzo's face wrinkled in a grin peculiar to himself, while he rolled his bloodshot goggle eyes. Elinor and Reggie waited expectantly, but nothing came.

" How tiresome you are, Ugo ! "

" He's saving it up to tell you privately," suggested Reggie,

" I heard of a villa to-day," Richard began. " It's at the other end of the lake, near Forno. Hohenthal said he believed it must be the place which an English novelist—— "

Reggie's interest prompted interruption.

" Raynor, he means. He wrote *Fireflies* there. Have you read *Fireflies*, Mrs Kurt ? "

" I don't think so. What was it about ? "

" Don't think so ? " There was an ironical ring in Reggie's laugh. " It's only one of the best novels of our time."

" I thought you didn't read prose."

Reggie turned to Richard.

" When was it I said that ? Let me see—a fortnight ago, was it ? No, it was yesterday, or was it this morning ? You're dreadfully literal, and life, allow me to suggest, is change."

" Consider yourself snubbed, Richard. What was the novel about ? " Elinor asked the boy.

" About a woman in society who left her husband and her children for the sake of love, and lived in a villa with a wonderful garden on the lake for five years without leaving it. But you must read it. I won't spoil the story. The point is that Raynor wrote it at this place Helmuth told your husband about. It's the most romantic spot imaginable."

Elinor was impressed.

" I should like to see it."

" You shall. I'll take you there—in Helmuth's motor-boat."

" Who is this Helmuth you talk so much about ? "

" Helmuth, Furst von Hohenthal, Prinzen von Donauwald, and to-morrow I'll introduce you to him and we'll eat strawberries and cream."

" Tell me all about him. What's he like ? "

" Very handsome, very tall, very charming, very clever, very rich, and he's my special property, and he thinks the world of me and believes everything I say. So mind you're nice to me."

The adjectives and the egotistical conclusion were too much for Baltazzo's feelings, already outraged by what he regarded as an assumption by the boy of intellectual superiority.

" *Et il porte des cornes superbes*," he interposed in a low voice.

Elinor did not understand the remark, but Reggie took it up promptly.

" He likes the Princess to be happy. All decent husbands like their wives to be happy, and Carlo Bassi is a poet. Poets are privileged."

Baltazzo subsided sulkily and Elinor pricked up her ears, scenting scandal.

" Oh, do tell me about it," she begged Reggie languishingly.

" There was once a princess who loved a poet. The poet was very poor—— "

" I say, do chuck it, both of you. The Prince was very nice to me ; I don't want his wife discussed in public."

Elinor gazed at her husband with wrathful contempt.

" Dear me ! Since when have we become so delicate ? "

vii

After dinner, finding the storm over and the sky clear, they took coffee on the terrace, Baltazzo and Reggie in turn strolling about the garden with Elinor, while Richard accommodated himself to the alternative society of each. He was accustomed to this rôle, and it disturbed him comparatively little. His agreeable solitude was at an end for the present anyhow, and it mattered little whether the society about him was more or less uncongenial. Elinor's sudden arrival had allowed him no time to think things out. Would she want to remain with him ? He intended to remain, if not at Drina, elsewhere on the lake, as long as his present liking for it lasted. It might be a humour, a mood, that would pass ; he could not tell. The fact remained that Elinor's whims would not move him, and if he went elsewhere he would go at his own bidding, not at hers. And if she, too, for one reason or another, elected to remain, how would that affect his present temper ? Would her presence modify his growing desire for a more reflective, a more intellectual, existence, or would even she fall under the spell of this beauty and be willing to curb,

for a time at least, her craving for the specious banalities of her world?

Towards eleven Elinor informed the party that she was tired. Baltazzo looked gloomy when she bade him goodnight. In the morning he had to go to Milan, where urgent business demanded his presence, and he realised that that infernal young coxcomb was in possession. Reggie grasped with delight the older man's jealousy, and, sure of Elinor's connivance, took full advantage of the opportunity to increase the pangs.

"I shall be waiting for you with the boat at twelve," he said, taking her hand with a sentimental expression and holding it, "and I'll sit at your feet and read you my last sonnet. I know the loveliest spot, quite close to this, where we can lie under the overhanging boughs and look down into the water, deep and clear as crystal."

Elinor smiled sweetly upon him as she turned away with Richard, and Baltazzo cut the end off a cigar and scowled.

viii

"Why you should make such a fuss about nothing and be such a wet blanket, I can't imagine," were Elinor's first words when they reached her bedroom, a large, comfortable room with a balcony overlooking the lake.

"I didn't come up with you for an argument," Richard answered. "I came to see if you had got a good room. Where have they put your maid?"

"Oh, she's all right. The other side of the dressing-room. The room will do." She looked round discontentedly. "There are no wardrobes that are any use, and the electric light's in the wrong place, so that I can't use the looking-glass. You must see to that to-morrow. The food's too filthy for words, of course."

"Is it?"

"Is it?" she repeated in an irritable voice. "You know it always is except in a handful of hotels."

"I was wondering whether I hadn't better have my room

changed to-morrow. It will look odd if I stay over there——"

"Look odd? To whom, I should like to know?—those frumps in the hotel? Do as you like, but if you're comfortable I should advise you to stay where you are. What about a sitting-room?"

"Well, you see, they haven't got any. You can use the one in my quarters." Richard was much relieved by his wife's scorn for appearances. He had no desire to change his room.

"That won't be much use to me. The only advantage of a sitting-room is to have it next to one's bedroom. But I don't suppose we shall be here long, shall we?" Elinor yawned as she spoke.

"I haven't thought much about it. I had no idea you were coming so soon."

"Thanks for the compliment. It's weeks since you left Taormina. However, that's not the point."

"Not the point" was a favourite expression of Elinor's. She used it on all occasions.

"What is?"

"What we're going to do, of course. What about this prince? Ugo was very mysterious about him. What's he like? Is he of any importance?"

"I don't know what you mean by important. He's refined, cultivated, a thorough man of the world. I don't know that you'll care much about him."

"Oh, indeed! Too intellectual, I suppose, for an ignoramus like me?"

Richard ignored the sneer.

"I mean, he does not seem to be much of a lady's man."

"Um!" Elinor was standing before the glass, taking her pearls out of her ears. Now she turned round sharply, with both hands to one of them, and looked at her husband with a meaning expression.

"Ugo said something like that."

"What of it? There *are* men who don't spend their lives dancing attendance on other men's wives."

Elinor turned to the glass again with her back to her husband.

" Are you jealous ? "

" Of Baltazzo ? Good heavens ! "

" Tell me about your friend, Reggie Brendon."

" He's not my friend. I happen to know his father slightly. He's a mere boy. I shouldn't get too intimate with him ; he's not reliable."

" Reliable—in what way ? I don't want him to rely upon. You seem to be pretty intimate, calling him Reggie after a few hours' acquaintance."

" What am I to call him ? The boy's all right, if you know how much you can trust him, that's all I mean."

" I've no intention of trusting him." Elinor left the mirror and threw herself into an arm-chair. " Can't you tell me all this to-morrow ? I'm awfully tired."

" Of course you are. I'd forgotten. I'll say good-night."

" Call Jeanne, please."

Richard went through the dressing-room, which was littered with every imaginable article of dress and toilet, and knocked on the door beyond. The maid appeared with sleepy eyes and followed him into the bedroom. Elinor, once more in front of the glass, was disentangling her coiffure. Richard stepped to her side and kissed her lightly on the cheek. As he did so she deposited a long dark tail of hair on the dressing-table.

CHAPTER VI

i

Less than a week later, by arrangement with Elinor, Richard went to the Casabianca Hotel at Bellabocca. He was to have a look at the Villa Aquafonti and, if the preliminary inspection was encouraging, to engage a suitable apartment at the hotel, when Elinor would join him.

He was not sorry to leave Drina. As was always the case, the peaceful atmosphere had given place, after Elinor's appearance, to a sense of strain and general discomfort. She was dissatisfied with the hotel management, and when Richard, having noticed nothing worth complaining about, declined her suggestion of " pitching into " the manager, she had done so herself, with the result that nothing had been changed and the sour-faced Swiss had shown his resentment by an attitude of studied insolence.

Elinor's meeting with the Prince had not been a success, although she thought it had.

Reggie had taken them to the Villa Carlotta on the day following their arrival, and Elinor, exquisitely dressed, had exerted all her powers of ingratiation. She was sensibly impressed by the Prince's personality, and the opulent taste of his surroundings, but, though he responded to her flattering remarks with many smiles and bows, his extreme politeness was, Richard knew, a mask for reserve. No one possessed in a higher degree the gift of putting acquaintances at their ease, but on this occasion he did not make use of it.

It was apparent that Elinor rubbed him up the wrong way. And yet she did not exactly gush, nor did she, as sometimes, look superior. But Richard was almost humiliatingly conscious of something inappropriate in her attitude and manner rather than in anything she said or did. There was a cold-

ness of atmosphere in which every idle phrase assumed undue significance, and this was exactly contrary to what he had previously experienced at the Villa Carlotta.

The agreeable ebb and flow of conversation, the animated discussions which had been the great attraction of his earlier visit, gave place to a mere exchange of perfunctory commonplaces, and even Reggie's attempts to infuse frivolity failed. In Hohenthal's responsiveness to suggestion lay his charm, but on this occasion he seemed deliberately to suppress his qualities and to exhibit a polished hardness in their stead.

Richard could not understand why Elinor should affect him to that extent. Hohenthal was exceedingly tolerant. Mrs Rafferty's disconcerting solecisms did not shock but even entertained him. Richard remembered the Prince had said that what he liked about her was her invigorating American frankness, for nowadays Americans had lost their faculty of making themselves valued by the sheer weight of their crudeness. Certainly Elinor never gave herself away by any exhibition of that kind. She was not a babbler about things of which she knew nothing. She was very assimilative and, in fact, rather clever in disguising her ignorance and adopting the attitude of those she was with. Even if Hohenthal had detected the superficiality of her culture and her passion for aristocratic associations, such weaknesses could only have been a source of amusement to one of his amiably cynical temperament. Yet the reason for Elinor's failure would have been clear to anyone but Richard ; the habit of years had blinded him.

When, on their departure, the Prince escorted her to the boat and handed her a superb bunch of roses tied with a broad green riband that went admirably with her dress, she showed plainly that she regarded this as evidence of the impression she had made. But there are people by nature so urbane that they disguise indifference or dislike by compliments, and Hohenthal was one of them.

Richard's first view of Aquafonti was on the evening of his arrival. Inquiry at the hotel elicited that it was almost exactly opposite and, hiring a boat, he rowed himself across the lake after dinner.

It was a cloudless night, brilliant with stars, and, pulling easily, he had almost reached the other shore when the moon rose above the mountain behind him.

Resting on his oars, he turned round in his seat and found that he was within fifty yards of a building lying back in a sort of little bay. The shadowy outline was barely perceptible in the misty darkness. A few more strokes brought him close under its wall, for the house was built into the lake itself. Just above his head a balcony ran along its side and, a boat-length away, steps descended into the water.

He made the boat fast to an iron ring and, mounting the steps, found himself standing beside the pedestal of an ancient statue on a moss-grown terrace. The boughs of a great tree waved high over his head, its leaves faintly rustling. On his right the fabric of the house stood black against the obstructed moonlight, which touched the summit of the mountain, dark at its base, with silver. Close to the head of the steps was an entrance door, which Richard tried but found locked, and the moon rays, stealing through the tangle around him, disclosed a neglected road winding amongst overhanging trees. Following this for fifty yards, it led him to a ruined stone bridge over a torrent. Under him the water murmured on its way to the lake. He saw that he was looking down on the other side of the house, which stood out brightly in the moonlight. Beyond him, on the left, stretched another terrace with a stone balustrade towards the lake, and at the far end a marble Madonna held out her arms as though to take the world to her embrace.

As he stood there a nightingale burst into song somewhere close behind him, another answered farther away, and yet another in the fainter distance. The place was a haunt of mystery and romance.

He made his way to the boat and paddled into the moonlight, drifting idly. The only sounds were the songs of the nightingales and the gentle splashing of the water against the villa wall.

Again the spell of the lake held Richard, its wonderful sweetness and peace and beauty.

He felt he could be happy in such a place as this, could

establish the foundations of a new and a worthier personality. He would be able to dream and think. In the contemplation of this loveliness he would acquire a new outlook, he would gradually gather knowledge. He would live away from the world and its vanities. What pleasure had they ever given him? Even Elinor herself might care less for them under such overpowering influences. And if she tired, if she longed for the world, she could go away whenever she liked. He had no intention of tying her down. But for himself he had found what he desired. This was "the something else" he had been seeking. He would write to his father at once. The old man had not for a long time refused him anything he really wanted. He would buy that villa and make it a thing of beauty, a home of culture and refinement. Good-bye to the stupid sports, the aimless time-killing of the past. Nature and Art should henceforth fill his life.

With such thoughts in his mind he bent his back to the oars and rowed swiftly to the hotel.

ii

Richard was up early the next morning. He wanted to lose no time before investigating Villa Aquafonti by daylight. He knew nothing about the price asked for the place, nor how much would have to be done before it could be made habitable, let alone arranged in the fashion he had in mind. At the hotel they could not even tell him to whom to apply for permission to view. The place was a ruin, the concierge told him, and there was no caretaker, for there was nothing worth stealing. When Mr Raynor was there he took everything with him that he needed; besides—did Mr Kurt know Mr Raynor? He was a very curious gentleman; he had two Sicilian servants with him. That, to the worthy Ticinese, seemed to settle the peculiarity of Mr Raynor. Richard breakfasted on the wide verandah, well screened from the morning sun and facing the lake. His eyes at once sought the villa, peering through the morning mist that overhung the water. Gradually he distinguished its blurred outline,

greyish-white against the sapphire background of the mountains, and more gradually its terraces painted themselves on either side, lighter patches faintly showing through the blue opaqueness of the haze, with the dark masses of trees above them. Its air of shrouded mystery and aloofness contrasted with the riot of colour in the flower-beds on the hotel terrace, bathed, as was all the hither side of the lake, in brilliant sunshine. Over there the whole length of shore was in shadow, except for an occasional patch of pale sunlight where the land jutted far enough into the lake to catch the rays of the sun as it rose higher, but upon the villa itself, lying back in its little bay, no gleam had yet fallen. It was almost sombre, Richard thought; but his new mood savoured a sweet melancholy, and romance compensated for sunshine.

"Monsieur is wanted on the telephone."

Richard started at the porter's voice, and jumping up followed him into the hotel.

It was Elinor's maid.

Madame wished her to tell Monsieur she was leaving Drina by the early afternoon boat and coming to Casabianca. Would Monsieur immediately engage rooms?

In answer to his inquiry as to this sudden change of plan, he could get no coherent explanation. The woman spoke indistinctly and was evidently flustered.

One of her tantrums with the hotel manager, no doubt, Richard concluded, replacing the receiver. It was just like her; but it didn't much matter. He would have preferred two or three days to himself in which to arrange matters, but perhaps it was just as well that she should be here. She was energetic and practical about anything she wanted herself, and if she liked the villa she would enjoy going into the plans and designing alterations.

Having selected an apartment, Richard ordered a conveyance with a driver who knew the locality, and went out again to the garden until it arrived.

The Hotel Casabianca owed its unusual attractiveness to having once been a private mansion, the *cachet* of which it preserved. Built in the cleft of two spurs of mountain, it was surrounded by a large park, laid out, in the romantic

style of the early nineteenth century, with broken arches, grottos and artificial ruins ; a long flight of stone steps flanked by cypress-trees were edged on either side by a runlet of water descending from a fountain in the form of a classic temple containing a statue. This rather imposing architectural arrangement faced the main entrance, which was at the back of the hotel, the front being entirely devoted to a wide terrace on the lake.

Richard mounted the steps. Pausing a moment at the top to regain his breath, he saw that mossy paths led from either side of the temple through groves behind and above it. The paths tempted him to further exploration ; he could run down to the hotel in a few minutes ; besides, his cab could wait. He caught sight of a belvedere a hundred feet higher, and, thinking what a lovely view he would get from it, he pushed on. The path had been designed by a cunning mind. It was a tortuous course, and after five minutes he found that he was going down as much as up, and he was about to abandon it and return to the hotel when a great dog leapt out of the shrubs on to the path in front of him. Richard was accustomed to dogs, but this shaggy beast of a breed unknown to him looked formidable and stood squarely facing him in a way that was not reassuring. Quickly determining that to turn now would give the dog the impression of fear, he kept on, and was within a pace of the huge animal when he heard a long, low whistle. The dog turned his head towards the sound, looked once again at Richard and, with a short, deep growl, bounded away.

Richard was not a nervous man, but as he turned back he congratulated himself that the encounter had not resulted in any trial of conclusions.

" Hulloa ! "

The exclamation was uttered in a very low, deep voice, almost like, but evidently not, the voice of a man. It came from somewhere close by him amongst the trees. He looked up and perceived a young woman, dressed in white, sitting on the edge of a bank some feet away on his left, with her gaitered legs dangling over a tiny rivulet, which evidently supplied the fountain below. Beside her, sitting on his

haunches, was the dog, with his tongue lolling out of his mouth between the great fangs.

" Hulloa ! " he answered, seeing that she was gazing at him.

" Did Boso frighten you ? "

She spoke in very distinct English with a peculiar accent, the " r " being un-Italian, harsh and guttural. Her expression was quizzical, and she was smoking a cigarette.

" Yes, he did a bit. He's rather big."

She laughed, and the sound was like her speaking voice, deep and harsh and unmusical.

" You're big too, and English. Englishmen aren't afraid of anything."

" You seem to enjoy frightening people."

Richard stared back at her. Her eyes were a greenish-grey, and her eyebrows, strongly marked and black, met above her prominent nose. She had a mass of bronze-coloured hair with a dash of red in it. It was beautiful in colour, but it was coarse, like the hair of a healthy peasant. What a big mouth she had, and how strong and white her teeth were ! He wouldn't like his finger to get between them. And her skin was tanned like a man's ; even her neck and the upper part of her breast were brown where her man's shirt was open at the neck. Her sleeves were rolled up above her elbow, and he could see dark hair upon her forearm as it lay upon the dog's neck. She wore a brown leather belt to which a large clasp-knife and a whistle were attached, and she held a heavy dog-whip with a swivel at the end of the handle.

" I like frightening men, not women or children."

" May I ask why ? "

" For fun, of course. Besides, they're so conceited. They think no one can do anything but themselves."

" No one ? You mean girls ? "

" Yes, girls."

She imitated his voice as she repeated the word. Richard laughed and she sat silent, swinging her legs and staring at him with her green eyes.

" Well, I must go on down." He would have liked to continue talking to the queer, provocative girl, and he felt she knew he would.

" You'll see Mrs Rafferty down there. Don't tell her you've seen me."

" How do you know I know her ? "

The girl thought a moment. All her actions were deliberate.

" I know," she answered in her deep voice. She pronounced " know " " knaw." " You're Mister Richard Kurt. Ha ! Ha ! You see, I knaw. Are you going to buy Aquafonti ? "

This time Richard was genuinely surprised, and showed it.

" How do you know I thought of it ? "

" I knaw." She said the words with the same inflection as before. He knew she was mischievously intent on puzzling him.

" As you seem to know everything, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling me who can give me information about the place."

She reflected again.

" I'll tell you if you'll promise me not to tell Mrs Rafferty you've seen me."

" I promise."

" Do you keep your promises ? "

" Yes. Do you ? "

" I keep them to my friends. Ask for the Notaio Zambuga, and tell him I sent you. Sh ! "

She put her finger to her mouth. Her eyes were now fixed on the great dog sitting motionless beside her, with his head on one side, evidently listening.

She leapt to her feet.

" Boso has heard something. That will be Flit and Flack."

" Who are they ? "

" You'll see. *Vieni*, Boso ! "

There was a flash of white, a rustle of boughs, and the girl disappeared into the thicket, followed closely by the dog.

iii

Richard found the carriage drawn up at the front door, awaiting him. He had his foot on the step, and was in the act

of telling the driver to take him to Notaio Zambuga's office in Como when he heard his name called.

Mrs Rafferty, in a garment that looked like a Chinese robe, and with an extraordinary arrangement of veils round her head, was standing in the doorway.

He withdrew his foot and went up the steps towards her, bowing.

" I saw you coming down from the fountain. Come to tea this afternoon, won't you? Get away, Flack."

She spoke in characteristic, off-hand fashion, hardly looking at him. In one hand she held a long staff with a tortoiseshell ball on the top; a tiny black and white Japanese spaniel nestled in the other arm, while a second was trying to climb up her dress, whimpering.

" You're very kind. I'm afraid I can't to-day. My wife is arriving this afternoon."

" Both of you come to lunch to-morrow, then—one o'clock sharp, or the food will be spoilt. You haven't seen a girl wandering about up there with a big dog, have you? " she continued, while Richard was bowing his acceptance.

" A girl? " he repeated blandly.

The innocent ignorance of his tone was sufficient answer, and she turned and went into the hotel.

Notaio Zambuga was over seventy years of age and a typical Italian of the old school, precise, efficient and kindly.

Richard's description of the strange girl was as good as an introduction. It was Donna Virginia Peraldi without a doubt, he said.

He would take immediate steps to find out what the owner, an old lady, was asking for the villa and its appurtenances, but he warned his client that she might be troublesome to deal with. No one had ever wanted the place, but as soon as she knew someone was after it, especially a rich Englishman, she would ask four or five times what it was worth. Meanwhile he would procure Richard all the necessary facilities for inspecting the property and would keep him informed. Their business was quickly finished and Richard rose to go.

Richard met the steamer and, leaving the maid and the hotel porters to deal with the mountain of luggage, deposited upon the landing stage after strenuous efforts on the part of the entire crew, he and Elinor walked on to the hotel, distant only a few hundred paces.

Elinor's manner was unusually cordial. Everything pleased her. It was incomparably nicer here, she said, than at the other end of the lake, and when they entered the grounds through a gateway flanked by a pretty lodge, and the white hotel building came into view, she was full of admiration.

" Why, it's like an English park, Dick ! "

When she called her husband " Dick " it was a sign of high good humour.

She kept up a running fire of observations and questions. What a charming approach, how nicely the grounds were laid out ! Had he got nice rooms on the front with a balcony ? Was the hotel comfortable and the food decent, and how did one get about ?

His answers seemed to satisfy her.

" What about the villa ? "

" Let's sit down a minute," Richard suggested, as they passed a seat under a tree a short distance from the hotel terrace.

She was wearing a pale blue linen coat and skirt with a silk shirt. From her travelling hat to her smart, pointed white shoes she was the quintessence of dainty neatness.

Richard wiped the seat carefully with his handkerchief and she sat down on its edge, sticking her legs out ; the gossamer silk stockings, tightly drawn over the slender ankles and well-turned calf, showed the white skin underneath. She tapped her high heels with the point of her parasol.

" I want to see the rooms and powder my nose and have tea."

He did not want to cross-question her, but, so far, she had volunteered no explanation whatever of her sudden arrival, in fact she had not alluded to it.

" You're not very communicative," he remarked.

" Communicative ? I've been talking a blue streak."

" What happened at Drina ? "

" What do you mean ? Nothing happened. That damned manager was impertinent, so I decided to leave, and here I am."

" Is that all ? "

Richard's tone expressed relief.

" That's all, as you call it, but if you had put the common brute in his place while you were there he'd have thought twice before—— "

She stopped abruptly. Her anger had evidently led her to say more than she intended.

" I wish you'd be more explicit, Elinor."

" Now, look here, Richard "—she turned round sharply and there was a defiant ring in her voice—" don't bother me with questions."

" But hang it all, Elinor, you're my wife. It's my business to know. If the fellow has done anything I can take up I'll very soon—— "

" There's nothing to take up. If there were, I should tell you. What good would it do me, I'd like to know, for you to have a row with a cad of a hotel manager ? " She got up from the seat and Richard followed her slowly.

" As you please, my dear girl, but you're getting awfully evasive, you know. To this day you've told me practically nothing about what you did after I left you at Taormina, and—— "

She stopped suddenly and faced round at him with a short, bitter laugh.

" Well, I like that ! You go crazy over a Vassar prig with her ' higher thought ' rot, and go cavorting off to Assisi with her, and when you get ready I've got to play the good-little-girl-in-a-high-chair act, saying, ' Yes, mamma,' ' No, mamma,' at the right places. Thanks very much. You run your show and I'll run mine."

She threw the words at him scornfully and, turning sharply, walked on.

Richard knew the expression of her face from the back.

He knew the backward tilt of the head meant that the rather long upper lip and pretty, straight nose were curling into a sneer, that the brown eyes were flashing under their long lashes and heavy lids. Elinor had a special set of expressive gestures for every part. The present set signified outraged dignity. Richard, familiar with the signals, knew that the next one would be a challenge to battle for which he was in no humour. Instead, he dropped the subject, lit a cigarette and, joining the elegant, slender figure, strolled on with her to the hotel.

V

Richard often caught himself wondering whether there was any conscious philosophy at the back of Elinor's mentality. Had she summed up life in her own way and come to the conclusion that social position and its functions were the only things that mattered, or had she simply accepted the formula upon which, so to speak, her eyes had opened?

Elinor had always affected to dislike America and Americans, and she certainly only dropped into transatlantic idioms and colloquialisms in moments of excitement, but Richard had never been able to perceive that her national characteristics had been otherwise modified. Like most of her compatriots whom he had met, she had never grasped the structure of English social life. In her admiration of the decoration she took the edifice itself for granted, assuming that the purpose for which it was erected was to support and display the gilded dome. She readily understood the absorption of money-making, but the idea that anyone could love work for its own sake would have seemed to her fantastic. If she ever thought at all about the ceaseless toil of the many, it would have been as a vague necessary part of a machine that neither concerned nor interested her. So far as he could judge, only those human activities counted for her which bore some relation to the comfort or amusement of the socially elect. He had come to this conclusion gradually, after studying her for years, and it in no wise shocked him. It would have applied to many in his own and other worlds, but Elinor's

indifference to anything except the decorative side of life was not associated with joyousness. She had not that love of life for its own sake which resulted, in the case of most American women with a similar ambition, in their making an art of the pursuit of pleasure. She loved luxury ; she was impressed by those who disposed of it, but her attitude towards them, unless they possessed the label of a certain social pre-eminence, was more than critical ; it was contemptuous. She despised in others that which she practised herself. The Prince wore the label. His entourage fascinated her, and Richard knew, though she had only spoken of him casually, that Brendon's self-indulgent egotism must be for her the last word in aristocratic epicureanism. The Honourable Reginald, with his scent, his Italian valet and his cushioned boat, would fill her eyes as the archetype of the wicked and delightful patrician. It was odd that she would allow the negligible impertinence of a hotel manager to interfere with intercourse so congenial. Something disagreeable must have happened, but since she appeared not to care, what was the use of his bothering himself ? It was not to-day that he had made up his mind to a tolerant indifference. He had gradually drifted into it as the only workable basis for his married existence. After all, she had a right to her own ideas and her own secrets, for that matter. As far as possible he would avoid interference with her actions, and if she found at last some other object than the gratification of her vanity, well, all the better. The freedom he would exact for himself, if occasion arose, he would never deny to her.

vi

Evidently Mrs Rafferty intended to show Mrs Kurt much consideration, for at midday her motor-boat appeared to take them to Villa Scapa.

They were about to start when, to their surprise, Ugo Baltazzo turned up. He too was of the party, and Elinor, always more at her ease when she had a reliable follower in attendance, cordially welcomed him.

Baltazzo's bibulous eyes watered with delighted emotion.

"I had no idea you were at Casabianca. That's where I live. You have already passed by it without knowing."

He pointed as he spoke to an uninteresting-looking, substantially-built house surrounded by trees and situated within the hotel park, from which its garden was separated by a wall.

"So that's your place? Charming!" It suited Elinor exactly to have a friend of some local importance within easy reach.

"We came to this end to look at the Villa Aquafonti," she continued, ignoring an allusion to her sudden arrival.

"You think of buying Aquafonti?" Baltazzo's tone showed eager interest. "Uberto Cigi was going to buy it a year or two ago, before the Bancaria smash."

Richard looked longingly towards it as they travelled swiftly through the water.

"It will need a lot to be spent on it to make it habitable." Elinor was not at all sure that she wanted to be committed to residence on Lake Como. There was much she would want to know first.

"There are others for sale if that doesn't suit you. I will find out. I'm sure you would love it here." Baltazzo's heart leapt at the thought of Elinor as a neighbour. He began, with unusual animation, to point out the villas as they scudded through the water. This one belonged to Marchese Forno; that was the Castello Bartolfi; that beautiful garden belonged to his friend Caperni—he gave a water-party every autumn. That was Badolfo's place; he had the fastest motor-boat on the lake.

But Elinor was as yet only mildly interested. She had first to get her bearings, and at present she wanted to know all about Mrs Rafferty's position. She knew her by name but had never met her. Was she a person to cultivate?

"I suppose she knows everybody about here?" she asked.

"Nearly everybody. At first people were a little—how shall I say?—doubtful, but gradually they went. She entertains a great deal and has spent a fortune on the place. People went at first as though it were a show; then they found it amusing."

Elinor was listening attentively and taking note.

"Who are the ones who don't go?" she asked.

Baltazzo slightly elevated his shoulders and eyebrows.

"Ah, *Dio mio!* Principessa Treviso, I suppose, and Duchessa Travolta. Guido Travolta would soon make his wife go if Mrs Rafferty were young and good-looking."

Another note. Richard did not miss the smile.

They were close to the Villa Scapa, a castellated building high above the lake, covered with creepers and half hidden by trees. On a central tower there was a flagstaff from which depended limply a huge American flag. Their boat shot alongside the landing-stage of a red-roofed boat-house covered with honeysuckle, clematis and sweet-peas, above which the garden rose in a series of walled terraces. Everywhere, as they walked slowly upwards, the eye was met by a profusion of flowers. Mrs Rafferty's energetic handiwork was unbelievably complete in the exhaustive adaptation of the most obscure corner to its specific floral purpose. Roses of every imaginable variety covered the walls and climbed trees or posts placed with that object. Not a space but was utilised for some flowering plant or creeper. It was a maze of colour and intertwining growth, and the air was heavy with the mingled scents. But the luxuriance of it was a little overdone, a little wearying. It was a fine, incoherent riot, but after a time the eye longed for repose, and Richard felt relieved when at last they reached the top. Here was Mrs Rafferty's lawn, the great triumph, and very beautifully it unfolded itself from the house to the low stone balustrade decorated with seventeenth-century statues. The whole flowering garden spread itself beneath. On either side were two great cypress-trees, between which a fountain was playing into a marble basin; here water-lilies raised their heads among the floating leaves. The whole formed a scene, perhaps somewhat vivid and theatrical, but full of obvious charm, and even Elinor, niggard of praise, could not withhold an expression of admiration to her hostess, who emerged upon her guests through a French window.

At his first meeting with Mrs Rafferty Richard had been unable to deny that, though one might dislike her, one could never ignore her. In appearance, taste and manner she was odd, without being vulgar or ludicrous. She was certainly possessed of a strong will, which forced itself upon people by its consistency and was reflected in everything she said ; a woman, one felt at once, who would never be beaten because she would never admit defeat.

He stood for a moment contrasting the two women in his mind, while they paced the lawn, Baltazzo uneasily hovering near. Elinor was, as always, exquisitely turned out, but, to Richard's taste, her costume was too carefully appropriate. If Mrs Rafferty's taste was *baroque*, Elinor's was Louis-Seize. She always affected delicate tints which suited her blue-black hair and rich skin, almost olive, with a mantling colour in the cheeks, assisted by a touch of rouge.

But both women had a feature in common—their mouths were hard, and in each case the lips were too thin, the upper one too long. Why was it that American women had these hard, thin lips ?

Elinor was in a flimsy, diaphanous costume of her favourite colour, pale blue, with a parasol to match, and the long, fashionable veil of the moment. Her slight, graceful figure contrasted with the older woman's stronger frame. Mrs Rafferty was not stout, but she was massive. About her beautiful hair and pale face was a mantilla of Venetian lace, evidently of value from the way Elinor eyed it.

They entered the house, which from its very threshold gave a sense of repletion. There was a prevalence of crimson damask, mirrors and pictures with carved and gilded frames. There seemed to be a tremendous lot of everything—of furniture, ornaments and decorative objects. One felt that magnificence was the aim, and there was a certain splendour in the ornate profusion of embroideries and rich brocades, of ivories and snuff-boxes, miniatures and rare porcelain. It was all overdone, but in the grand manner, as though the owner had been influenced by reading Vathek.

The dining-room was spacious, and the round table, on which there was no cloth, was of green marble, highly polished. The service was of silver-gilt, and in the middle was an enormous epergne filled with blood-red flowers. Mrs Rafferty attached importance to food, but not more so than did Elinor. Conversation opened upon that subject, and this roused Baltazzo, who appeared to be an authority. Richard was but exiguously interested in the cooking of young turkeys, and his eyes ranged round the flamboyantly decorated room. The walls were crowded with pictures. Of these the largest and most prominently hung was a full-length portrait of Mrs Rafferty, evidently painted in her early married life. She was seated on a sort of throne, from which descended steps covered partly with a purple carpet and partly with the long train of her golden robe. Around her neck and depending from it was a necklace of the largest pearls he had ever seen.

" You will not get the right flavour unless—— You must preserve the natural fat—a mere suspicion of—— " Hidden from him by the great epergne, Baltazzo was confidentially explaining an item of culinary art to the two ladies.

Richard's thoughts wandered away again with his eyes, which sought the long, open window behind Mrs Rafferty. As he looked towards it the tail of something light caught his eye. The open space outside was flagged ; beyond he could see some steps and a low wall. A Dutch garden, no doubt. A few feet away on the stones someone had deposited two plates. A sound of whining and scampering—Flit and Flack were upon them, gobbling as though for their very lives.

" The darlings ! " Elinor was in raptures.

" They're rather good ones, both prize dogs. I'll show you the puppies afterwards." Mrs Rafferty knew her guest envied her these little creatures, worth perhaps their weight in gold.

Elinor's enthusiasm for dogs, especially of the preposterously small, rare order, amounted to passion. The conversation veered to the new topic. Richard's thoughts and eyes could again take holiday. The dogs were standing beside their respective plates, smelling each other's mouths and snarling.

" Come here, Flit ! "

The small creature bounded into Mrs Rafferty's lap, while its companion dashed eagerly towards Elinor, who was holding up a tempting tit-bit between her finger and thumb.

" Don't feed him, please. I never give them anything except their regular meals."

Elinor put back the morsel on her plate, but she was visibly annoyed by the reprimand.

" They must be very delicate," she could not resist saying.

Richard had hardly noticed the incident. He was still gazing out of the window, and, just as his wife spoke, he had caught sight of a head carefully thrust forward. He had time before the head was quickly withdrawn to observe a pair of green eyes fixed upon him.

" By the way," he asked Mrs Rafferty, " did you find Donna Virginia Peraldi yesterday ? "

His question had relieved an awkward situation. Elinor's sarcastic remark had taken effect. Mrs Rafferty's face was grim. But the expression gave place to another at Richard's question. She perceptibly brightened.

" Oh, Virginia. I found her when I got back from Como. She's here somewhere. She never comes in to meals ; prefers eating bread, or something easy to carry about, out of doors."

" What a queer person ! " Elinor's eyes met Richard's suspiciously as he said " I don't blame her," while Baltazzo's goggly smile towards Elinor conveyed that there was no accounting for tastes.

" I haven't seen old Emilio Peraldi for a year. Do you know how he is ? " he asked Mrs Rafferty.

" Failing fast, from what Virginia says."

" They're originals, the Peraldis," Baltazzo said to Elinor. " I saw the other sister, Donna Brigita, dressed like a peasant, sitting in a donkey-cart outside Como station when I arrived this morning."

Elinor looked amused.

" Really ? What odd girls they must be ! "

Mrs Rafferty's expression was becoming grim again, but she said nothing, and Richard looked towards the window. He was wondering uncomfortably if the girl was still there, and was casting about for another subject.

" Is this beautiful garden your creation, Mrs Rafferty ? "

She turned her pallid face towards him for the first time since the meal began. He noticed the dullness of her eyes and the innumerable tiny curved lines round them as she looked at him, blowing smoke from her nose. They had finished eating, and coffee and cigarettes had been served.

" Not only the garden, the whole place—alone—with these two hands." She lifted them as she spoke ; they were white but broad, with the short, stubby fingers of one who knows how to use them. He saw that the nails, though dirty, had been highly polished and the red paste had clung to them. " You're looking at my nails. That's Virginia's work ; not very good, is it ? "

Richard smiled, a trifle embarrassed.

" It must have been a big job to remake a place of this size."

" It was and it is. There's a lot more to do. But it's the chief object of my life to finish it. You're probably thinking fools build for wise men." She had a level, toneless way of speaking. The American accent could be recognised, but long residence in Latin countries had softened it. Her manner was that of one who does not care a button what people think.

" Proverbs are generally false. It can't be foolish to do what gives one so much interest. One might be a fool to care who lived in it afterwards."

" I don't." She rose as she spoke. " I only care for doing it. Come, I'll show you."

viii

They went out through the window together, the others following.

" It was a ruin in a wilderness when I bought it. They said I got it cheap ; as if you ever get anything cheap from an Italian ! There wasn't any water supply even, except a well, and, as for drains—I've spent twenty thousand francs on them alone. This Dutch garden is where the old stables were—a regular plague-spot."

They walked on, she pointing with the staff she carried, explaining the changes she had wrought. Elinor and Baltazzo slipped away. They had reached a point where there was a sharp incline with some steps in the distance. Here Mrs Rafferty stopped.

" That's enough for me. My heart won't stand these steps, and the men are too busy to carry me. Ah ! there's Virginia ! Come here, girl ! "

Richard heard steps behind him, and turned. Flit and Flack darted off and the girl stopped to caress them.

" Be polite, Virginia. This is Mr Kurt."

She held out her hand and grasped his firmly like a man, looking straight into his eyes, as though she had never seen him in her life. Then she crossed her arms behind her back and stood so without speaking.

Mrs Rafferty continued explaining past, present and future alterations, and Richard followed the pointings of her staff with absent-minded politeness.

" I'd rather like to have a look at the house and grounds from above if there's a good view. It would give me a better idea—— "

" Virginia, take Mr Kurt up to the belvedere. It's not finished, you know. Explain it to him. You know what I'm going to do to it."

The girl's wide mouth opened in a laugh that was carelessly impertinent.

" Oh, yes, I knaw," she threw over her shoulder, racing upwards, while the old lady turned and walked slowly towards the house.

" How slow you are ! "

The girl had already reached the top of the steps and called down to Richard a hundred feet below.

" I'm not as young as you."

" Young enough. You're lazy." Her voice almost barked at him, it was so deep and guttural and husky.

The belvedere was built in the form of a small classical temple, a dome supported by pillars, on a rocky prominence fully three hundred feet above the house. The work was unfinished ; a heap of cement, water and workmen's tools lay

about. The girl took up a board and a trowel and began laying a bed of cement upon a piece of wall ; with some effort she lifted a heavy block of stone on to it. Richard stood watching her.

" You seem to know all about it."

" I did all that piece."

She pointed with the trowel as she bent over her work, with her feet wide apart ; through her thin, unlined skirt he could see the shape of her legs. It was the ungraceful and unabashed attitude of a male, and Richard could not help wondering whether it was natural or deliberate.

" What else can you do ? "

" Oh, any kind of rough work."

How unpleasant those rasping " r's " were to the ear !

She continued laying and smoothing the cement, then, putting down the board and trowel, she selected another block and heaved and strained at it, breathing hard, reddening with the exertion.

" If you go on like that I shall have to take a hand."

" You'd spoil your clothes," she jerked at him, grunting with the strain and without looking up. " You'll have to go down to Mrs Rafferty. Why don't you look at the view ? That's what you came up for, wasn't it ? "

" No ; I wanted to talk to you. What happened yesterday ? "

" I took Boso home, then I bicycled here. Why ? "

She stopped her labours and looked up at him from her stooping posture, wiping beads of perspiration from her forehead with the back of her hand. A strand of her coarse, ruddy-brown hair had loosened and hung over her eyes, and under her arms her linen shirt was wet and clung to her body, showing the form of her breast, very small and firm.

" No, why ? I'm interested."

" What in ? "

" You."

She had got the stone in its place, and was spreading the cement.

" I'm not interesting. Ask Mrs Rafferty. She says I'm stupid and ignorant because I don't like antiques and reading."

" What do you like ? "

" I like horses and dogs and rowing and sailing and swimming and working with my hands. You're a funnee man, you ask so many questions."

She laid down the trowel and stood in front of him with her knuckles on her hips. She had no hat ; her mass of hair was plaited tightly round her head in a long coil. He noticed that the colour of her sunburnt skin was unbecoming, and the sun showed up a dark line of down upon her upper lip. Her teeth were dazzlingly white, but large, like those of an animal.

" I like these things too. I didn't know Italian ladies were given to them."

" They aren't, nor the men either. They only ride, and this country isn't good for riding like Ireland."

" You've been to Ireland, then ? "

" Yes. I stayed with Munro and Cissy."

" Who are they ? "

" Mrs Rafferty's son and his wife. He has a pack of hounds. But I'd rather go to Australia ! "

" To Australia ? Good gracious ! What for ? "

" Because I can't do what I like here."

" What do you want to do ? "

She had dipped her hands into a bucket of dirty-looking water and was wiping them on a coloured rag left by the workmen.

" I want to live like a man."

Richard looked at the girl. How old would she be ? Twenty-two or three, perhaps. She might be ignorant, but she certainly was not immature, and with such a mouth and chin she must know her own mind. His eyes travelled down her body to the light holland skirt, very short and buttoned down the side. Some of the buttons were undone and showed a leg clad in a man's linen riding-breeches close about the knee. There was a stain of dirty water on the front of the skirt. She had on heavy lace boots and leather leggings.

" You seem to be able to do that here."

" No. I tried to work with the *muratori*, but they stopped me ; and the fishermen, but they stopped that. They won't even let me stay up at the farm at Casana."

" Who are ' they ' ? "

" Oh, mother and Mrs Rafferty—everybody."

" But Mrs Rafferty has nothing to say in the matter, has she ? "

The girl paused before answering.

" Not exactly, but, you see—— " She paused again. " She lets me stay here whenever I like, and I'm freer here than anywhere else, and when she interferes I frighten her—— "

" Frighten her ? " Richard laughed. " How ? "

" I tell her I won't come back."

" I see. She can't do without you, you mean."

She paused again.

" I suppose I'm useful about the place. I can talk to the people and get things done, and I do the accounts and pay bills."

" By Jove ! I should think you were useful."

Suddenly the girl sprang on to the balustrade beside him and, sliding over its side, let herself down and clung an instant to the pediment with her fingers. As he gazed over the side she dropped to an overhanging ledge below.

" Good-bye ! " she called up, and before he could answer she was out of sight.

ix

Mrs Rafferty insisted on her guests staying for tea. She was determined that they should not go until they had seen everything she wanted to show them. Elinor had got over her annoyance, and Richard noticed that she was becoming more and more interested in Mrs Rafferty's past and present operations. All the better, he thought, if she caught the enthusiasm and took it into her head to try her hand at the same game. " Aquafonti " would supply her with an object for a long time to come.

They had been conducted all over the house. Mrs Rafferty left nothing to their imagination. They inspected the reception-rooms, the billiard-room and the Chinese boudoir, Mrs Rafferty's enormous bedroom, with her bed on a dais in the

middle, and her dressing-room, with a marble bath let into the floor. On the other side of this was a large chamber, the walls of which consisted of huge wardrobes full of every kind of garment, some of these being, as Mrs Rafferty took care to demonstrate, of a most intimate description.

" And this is my maid's room, but Virginia uses it when she comes."

" But where's the bed ? " Elinor asked, as they poked their heads in at the door.

Mrs Rafferty pointed to the corner where a large roll of canvas stood on end.

" It's a hammock. She slings it across the balcony outside my room there. She won't have a room with a bed in it."

Elinor looked at Baltazzo, who grinned.

" At Casana," he remarked, " I've been told she sleeps out of doors."

Elinor shrugged her shoulders, and the procession continued its progress through the best guest-rooms, bachelors' quarters, bath and linen rooms, finally descending to the kitchens.

The cook and his aide, in virginal white from head to foot, were obviously delighted at his admiration. Baltazzo stood for a moment as though transfixed, with his eyes riveted on the range, an intricate and highly polished affair in the centre of the kitchen, with a burnished copper rail encircling it, which he fingered lovingly. Then he gazed with awe at the large windows screened against insects, the electric fans, the mosaic floor, curved where it met the white-tiled walls.

" What a kitchen ! " he ejaculated.

They got him away, but he had taken the infection, for, when at last they reached the lawn again, Richard, walking behind with Mrs Rafferty, heard him say, " I must have a range like that," and something else about marmitons and saucepans.

" Ugo has fallen in love with your kitchen," he said with a laugh to Mrs Rafferty.

" The kitchen's the best place for him to begin at. He needs something to occupy his silly mind," was her reply.

Tea had just been brought under the trees when a servant announced Prince von Hohenthal. His tall, erect figure,

dressed in white, came towards the group across the lawn. He bowed over the ladies' hands and, nodding to the two men, dropped into a chair beside Richard.

" You see, I've kept my promise, Mrs Rafferty. The lawn is marvellous ; all my congratulations."

Mrs Rafferty's faded, impassive face brightened at the praise of her work.

" At last it's beginning to take hold."

" We've admired everything so much that we're reduced to dumbness," remarked Elinor.

The Prince accepted a cup of tea and looked round him.

" Yes, Mrs Rafferty is wonderful, indefatigable. That fountain is charming, and that statue. How clever of you to find such a good example of seventeenth-century garden decoration ! "

Mrs Rafferty was disappointed. She had really thought it much too good for garden decoration. It was characteristic of her to change the subject. " How is it you didn't bring Reggie, Prince ? "

He hesitated an instant, lifting his cup to his lips.

" He went off to England this morning ; in fact I've just seen him off from Como."

Mrs Rafferty was offering Elinor a piece of cream cake and almost dropped it in her surprise.

" How's that ? He told me he intended to stay until the end of June or longer."

Hohenthal made the slightest perceptible gesture with his head, but said nothing.

It occurred to Richard that he had forgotten the boy's existence from the time he left Varenna until that moment. Involuntarily he glanced at Elinor, but only for an instant ; for some reason Mrs Rafferty had noticed the direction of his eyes and was also looking at her. With a relief he would have found it difficult to explain, he observed that she continued eating her piece of cake with every appearance of unconcern.

" I shall write and give him a piece of my mind for going off like that without telling me. He was to pay me a visit next week."

Richard felt uneasily that Mrs Rafferty was determined to probe the matter further.

" He's sure to write to you. Reggie prides himself on his social punctilio. He told me that he had to leave at a moment's notice and that I should hear from him."

As he spoke the Prince turned with his pleasant smile towards Richard, asking him how he liked that end of the lake, and the immediate response lightened a situation which was threatening embarrassment.

Tea was finished, and Mrs Rafferty seized her staff.

" Now I must show you everything."

They all rose and, leaving her to begin her exposition over again for the Prince's benefit, her other guests took their departure.

CHAPTER VII

i

Richard felt uncomfortably convinced not only that Brendon's and his wife's almost simultaneous departures from Varenna were in somewise connected, but that the boy had informed the Prince of the precise circumstances.

In Hohenthal's manner, in the very pressure of his hand, and in the expression of his face when they said good-bye to each other, it galled him to recognise a special considerateness.

Elinor, for her part, appeared to be on excellent terms with herself. After her visit to Mrs Rafferty her rather lukewarm consideration of Aquafonti gave place to enthusiasm. She now thought it would be ideal to have a villa on the lake. How far Baltazzo had contributed to this view Richard did not know, but the two seemed to act and react on each other. Villas and their alteration, decoration and furnishing were the never-ceasing and all-absorbing topic of conversation between them, and Elinor spent every day rushing about the lake in the hotel motor-boat, inspecting places Baltazzo said were in the market, but which on investigation generally proved to be either priced at an extravagant figure or wholly undesirable. There was no doubt about Aquafonti being the best villa available, and Richard wrote fully to his father pointing out the many advantages of buying it, not the least of which was that, after the initial cost, the upkeep would involve an expenditure trifling by comparison with his previous sporting establishment.

Mr Kurt offered no opposition. He replied that Richard could draw upon him for a stipulated sum to cover the purchase, leaving further outlay to be considered afterwards.

So far so good. Baltazzo's services were requisitioned. He knew the ways of his countrymen and had methods of his

own in dealing with them. There were frequent meetings at the stuffy office of old Notaio Zambuga, but the negotiations were long, and both Richard and Elinor were much exercised. Suddenly the old lady threatened to break off further treaty. Although the notary warned them that this was the invariable preliminary to a bargain being struck, they raised their offer. The old lady still held out. Finally Baltazzo made a suggestion, as a result of which Richard and he paid a visit to the notary's office with a lump sum in cash in their pockets. The effect was magical. Richard issued from the interview the owner of Aquafonti, its several acres of foreshore and mountain, and Baltazzo reached high-water mark in Elinor's esteem.

From that moment Aquafonti was for the Kurts no longer merely Aquafonti ; it was an obsession ; but it was something more—it was a symbol.

For Elinor it was not a dilapidated house of romantic aspect, which she proposed to convert lavishly into an up-to-date plaything ; it became, as Villa Scapa to Mrs Rafferty, the object of her existence. For Richard it assumed another form. It embodied the idea, the home of his dreams. In it the spell of the lake was materialised.

And rapidly the bond that bound them both to this thing they owned in common became a fetter. These two prisoners of Fate hugged the chains by which they were linked to each other.

ii

Matters were hurried forward.

Recommended by Baltazzo, the architect Baraldi was called in to draw plans which, modified in accordance with Elinor's views, were adopted and proceeded with.

From the moment that the place was theirs Elinor had taken the lead, and Richard, impressed by her quite remarkable grasp of practical detail, and still more by her self-confidence in technical matters, let her have her head. She bullied and harassed the poor architect till he didn't know whether he was standing on his head or his heels. But before

a month was over the work was well in hand and, as far as the structural alterations, bade fair to be finished by the autumn.

Richard and Elinor now spent their entire days at Aquafonti. A gardener had been found, one Domenico, a big, capable Comacine with a tremendous capacity for work. He engaged labourers, and the cutting, clearing and preliminary laying-out of the grounds proceeded apace. Elinor oversaw everything. She had already clearly mapped out in her brain the general scheme of the future garden, and worked it out with forethought and skill. She had little or no knowledge of gardening, but she possessed the American gift of rapid assimilation and learnt as she went on day by day. Gradually, too, she picked up sufficient Comasco from Domenico to make him understand her intentions, and Richard was astonished when he saw how quickly she dispensed with his interpretations.

Likewise with the house. Once she had an idea in her head she brushed aside Baraldi's objections on account of structural difficulties. When the architect mildly suggested that the estimate did not allow for a particular addition she desired, Elinor replied that it was indispensable. As this was almost a daily occurrence, the cost mounted up by leaps and bounds. Baraldi was an honest man, but he saw that this was going to be a big job, and he soon discovered that Richard's opposition to increasing expenditure invariably gave way before his wife's insistence. Evidently, he thought, they were rich, and it was no affair of his.

There was nothing at Aquafonti but bare walls and trees and romance. Everything else, except a spring of drinking water, cold as ice and clear as crystal, had to be expensively provided. And each item in the endless list constituted a problem in itself.

The main water supply had to be piped from Como, the electricity brought thence at Richard's expense. A great cistern had to be constructed for the one and a transformer for the other.

The garden was nothing but a mountain-side, and a gardener's lodge at the top had to be supported by a wall of immense thickness, thirty feet in height. Space for a green-

house had to be found by blasting a terrace out of the solid rock. A whole new wing devoted to kitchens and servants' offices below, and their bedrooms above, had to be added. On the side of the house to which the roadway descended there was no proper entrance. A new one had to be made, and Elinor boldly met the "*Impossibile, signora!*" of Baraldi by telling him to cut a doorway where there was a window and throw a decorative stone bridge over the steps where Richard had moored his boat on the occasion of his first moonlight visit. This would give access to the drive and the terrace on the lake beyond.

Elinor knew what she wanted and was determined to let nothing stand in her way. Her energy developed with her enterprise. Decidedly, Richard thought, she was efficient, much more so than he was, and he would back her up. That was the least he could do. The estimates were exceeded by a third, never mind; by a half, never mind again. They were doubled. A little uneasy, Richard wrote to his father explaining the difficulties of exactly gauging the expenditure at first. Mr Kurt remitted the cash with a warning. They went ahead.

iii

Late one tropical afternoon they had thrown themselves into wicker chairs. Really exhausted, Richard had insisted on the rest, to which Elinor reluctantly assented.

"There's the motor-boat just leaving the hotel; we shall have to knock off anyhow." But, instead of the hotel motor-boat, it was Mrs Rafferty's which ran alongside the steps ten minutes later.

She caught them unawares. Elinor's smile did not express cordial welcome as Flack bounded towards them, barking. Mrs Rafferty approached, with the other dog tucked in the fold of her arm, her staff in the right hand, and followed at some paces by Virginia, with her hands in the pockets of her skirt.

"They told me at the hotel they were just sending for you, so I thought I'd call for you instead."

" Too kind." Richard's perfunctory mutter fell on her ears unheeded. Her dull eyes, half closed but observant, travelled to the scaffolded fabric of the house, took in the confused assortment of building material and the distant figure of Domenico bending to some labour in the background of trees. Then her gaze returned and rested on Elinor, whose hand just touched hers.

" Tiring work, isn't it ? "

She sat down slowly beside Elinor in Richard's chair, as he moved to greet Virginia, standing motionless, still with her hands in her skirt pockets.

The girl wore a spotless white shirt and skirt, but the inevitable leggings showed below incongruously. Under a wide sombrero her green eyes fastened upon the man's. Richard asked himself if there was mockery in the stare.

" Why didn't you send for me ? "

The deep, guttural voice struck on his ear with the same challenging effect as when he first saw her.

" Why ? "

" To help build, of course. I understand *muratore* work."

" But you said *they* wouldn't let you."

She uttered a sound that was more a gurgle than a laugh. It came from her chest.

" Shall I ask her ? " She nodded towards Mrs Rafferty.

" Why not ? " Richard's tone was bantering.

She had as yet not spoken to Elinor, who to outward appearance had not noticed her presence. The girl gurgled again, but she did not move. She threw a lowering glance under her hat brim at the two ladies, whose backs were towards her.

" I won't now. She's talking to your wife. I'll sit in the boat and go to sleep."

" To sleep ? Now ? " Richard burst into a laugh.

" I always sleep when I've got nothing to do." The girl turned sharply, leaving him standing. Richard hesitated an instant ; his impulse was to follow her. He watched her descending the stone stairs to the motor-boat, which lay out of view ; he heard the creak of the wooden bottom as her foot touched it. He took a step or two to the edge of the

terrace and peered over. She had thrown herself on a heap of cushions in the bow and was tying down the awning. The sun was slowly setting in the cleft of the range beyond Chiasso and casting its blinding rays into her eyes. The boatman was doing something to his engine and apparently had not noticed her. Richard glanced back towards his wife and Mrs Rafferty. It would not do, but he wished he could stay a moment with this queer girl. She drew him strangely. He was about to turn when he caught her green eyes gazing up at him. She held the awning from her. " Tell Mrs Rafferty I've gone to sleep," then let it fall.

" Your wife says you're too busy to come over to lunch to-morrow, Mr Kurt, but you both need a rest in this heat."

" Very kind of you, Mrs Rafferty, but there's so much to do. Constant problems—as you know." Mrs Rafferty's sunken eyes slowly followed Richard's hand. He was pointing towards the end of the terrace. " Should that wall be lowered, for instance ? It's the boundary, but beyond are trees—waste space, and we are considering—— "

He broke off. Elinor's face expressed intense annoyance. Richard understood she had no desire to tell their secrets, these undetermined details, to Mrs Rafferty. Such things were part of their common oblation to their idol ; they were sacrosanct. To obtain suggestions was one thing, to consult this woman, Elinor's utter inferior in taste, another.

But Mrs Rafferty was not so easily disposed of.

" I can give you an idea," she remarked slowly and firmly. " Throw down the wall and build a wooden lattice. Train climbing roses over it."

Elinor rose impatiently.

" As you were so kind as to offer to take us across, Mrs Rafferty—— "

" You'll show me round first, surely ? I came on purpose."

But Elinor was firm ; her pleading of fatigue could not be gainsaid. A few moments later they were speeding across the lake.

On either side of the bows seats were fixed. On one of these Virginia sat steering. Richard had taken the other. She had thrown off her hat, her rich, bronze-coloured hair, carelessly

coiled round her head, gradually loosened and the heavy tresses fell about her neck and shoulders.

" Take the wheel a moment, please."

She thrust her hair back in a great bunch, pulling her hat over it.

" You steer zigzag. Look aft."

She pointed to the stern, beyond which their course showed in a white streak which in truth was far from straight. As they both turned in their seats to look back they came close to each other. Richard felt the pressure of her leg against his ; her mouth with its glistening teeth was very near to his ; he fancied her breath fanned his cheek as she said, " I'll teach you," and put her hand on the wheel so that their fingers touched.

iv

Summer was melting into autumn. August came. The lodge and the servants' wing were finished. Elinor said they must move in ; they could picnic there and so be on the spot for the decorating and furnishing. The upper rooms were habitable. What did it matter if they roughed it a little while the decoration was being done ? If only that fool Baraldi would get her those stucco-workers. He'd been promising for weeks, but they hadn't turned up yet. She was sick of his promises. And the boxes containing furniture and bric-à-brac that had been stored in the different places where they had been " picked up " kept on arriving. It was maddening.

It was their habit to breakfast in bed and take the hotel motor-boat across to the villa. So far the weather had been brilliantly fine—almost an African summer.

One morning they were awakened by a terrific thunderstorm. Richard descended as usual, but there was no question of crossing the lake. A fierce *bergamasco* was lashing its surface into enormous waves ; they would be swamped, the boatman said. As they stood together talking a small object came into view in the distance, now appearing on the crests of the waves, now disappearing in the trough of them. What

was it? Richard asked. Surely no one would go out in a small boat in such weather!

It was an ordinary dinghy which the fierce wind was driving towards the shore, threatening to dash it against the wall of the terrace. Richard recognised Virginia. She was standing in the stern rowing, if rowing it could be called, from tall rowlocks so adjusted that she could use the oars facing towards the nose of the boat.

With great skill and coolness she steered through the narrow entrance of the *porto* and into the shallow water at their feet.

As the boatman stooped to take hold of the side of the boat Virginia, placing her hand with a gesture of easy familiarity on his shoulder, jumped lightly and cleanly on to the wooden landing-stage.

"*Ecco*, Giacomo! *Che lago burbero!*"

The guttural exclamation was a little breathless. She was drenched to the skin; her white jersey and duck skirt were sticking to her body like a bathing dress; the boat was two-thirds full of water.

"I thought I'd come over and tell you about the *stuccatori*."

She stood there dripping, addressing Richard.

"*Stuccatori!* Damn the *stuccatori!* You've nearly got drowned. Come and get dry immediately."

He grasped her hand determinedly and pulled her towards the hotel, but she drew it from him.

"I've got my bicycle at Giacomo's. I must get back to Scapa. Mrs Rafferty needs me."

"D——" He was going to say "Damn Mrs Rafferty." "Now, look here, young lady, I shan't let you till you're dry."

She placed her two knuckles on her hips and gurgled towards Giacomo. "He thinks I mind getting wet. *Dica pure*, Giacomo, do I mind water?"

The Comasco shrugged his shoulders, pursed his mouth, lifted his eyebrows and dropped his head without speaking. Richard half smiled at the wordless pantomime.

"The *stuccatori* will be at Aquafonti as soon as the storm is over, Misterr Kurrt. *Vieni*, Giacomo."

She plucked the boatman by the sleeve and went towards

the wooden shed where he kept his boating tackle. Disappearing within, he emerged with the bicycle.

Richard had followed.

"One moment, Miss Virginia, please. I must at least thank you——"

"Naw, don't call me 'Miss.' I'm Virginia. Thank Mrs Rafferty."

Jumping on the bicycle, she was half-way to the hotel before Richard could say another word.

The storm subsided as suddenly as it arose.

True to their promise, the *stuccatori* arrived. They were twins, and turned out to be marvels of skill. They lived high up the mountain in a little village above Terno, as one of them told Richard. They had almost given up doing stucco-work. It was all made in France by machinery nowadays and applied to the surface, not worked in, as they did it.

Donna Virginia had been at their *podere* at daybreak, had drunk goat's milk with them and wouldn't go till they promised to do the work. Ah, yes. They knew Donna Virginia. All the *muratori* knew her. She enjoyed working like a man.

Elinor had been but little interested in Richard's account of Virginia's adventure.

"There's nothing in it. She likes to show off."

"I tell you she risked her life to come across the lake."

"That's not my fault, is it? She did it to please Mrs Rafferty. By the way, you ought to call and thank her. These men are splendid. They've exactly caught my idea. The Louis-Seize ceiling will be a gem."

Richard was not loath to go to Villa Scapa. He hardly owned to himself how much he wanted to see Virginia again. The girl's strange individuality was beginning to haunt him. What was underneath it?

Telephoning to announce his visit, he and Elinor were bidden to dinner. With Mrs Rafferty any excuse sufficed for an entertainment.

They found her awaiting them in the crimson ante-chamber, dressed in gold brocade, with her beautiful hair surmounted by a parure of diamonds. A young man arrived immediately

after them. He was dressed in white trousers, with his evening jacket, and a scarlet sash round his waist like a Neapolitan *barcajuolo*. He kissed Mrs Rafferty's hand effusively.

" Cavaliere Pini—Mr and Mrs Kurt. He plays the violin divinely."

" Paquin, I see." Her dull, sunken eyes regarded Elinor's cream-coloured dress with grudging approval.

" Horrid old rag—a last year's model."

Pini, who smelt strongly of scent, seemed to Richard to be impressed by the remark, as he scrutinised the dress with interest. His manner was effeminate and supercilious under a veneer of exaggerated affability.

" A lovely creation," he remarked to Elinor, with a low bow, " indeed a dream."

Richard turned to Mrs Rafferty.

" We haven't thanked you for the *stuccatori*. It was so kind of you."

She slowly lifted her face as he stood by her chair.

" The *stuccatori ?* I know nothing about them. What *stuccatori ?* "

For an instant Richard was nonplussed. He glanced at Elinor. Engaged in conversation with Pini on the other side of the room, she had not heard Mrs Rafferty's reply.

" Miss Peraldi sent them—— "

An almost imperceptible change of expression came over Mrs Rafferty's impassive face.

" So that's where she was yesterday morning ! "

Richard thought a moment. Was it yesterday or the day before ? Surely it was—no—yes. To-day was Saturday. It was—— Quickly he changed the topic.

" And the dogs ? "

He had pleasantly missed the sniffings and barkings.

" With Virginia. She gives them their bath on Saturdays. Pini, take in Mrs Kurt."

She gave her arm to Richard as the double doors to the dining-room were thrown open.

Mrs Rafferty informed Richard that Pini suffered from some kind of affection of the throat and could not bear tobacco.

Would Mr Kurt take his coffee in the dining-room and join them in the Chinese boudoir when he had finished smoking?

The low window was open to Mrs Rafferty's *chef d'œuvre*, the lawn. He strolled across and stood looking down on the still lake below.

Would he be able to see Virginia? He was half angry with himself for being unable to keep his thoughts from her. What could there be in this girl to hold him? Hark! Wasn't that a bark? Another second and the little beasts were yapping round his feet, and there she was on the path below him.

As usual. "Hulloa!"

She was smoking and had on a sort of brown overall, the front of which was wet. Leaning against a low wall, puffing smoke, she gazed up at him.

"I've been washing the dogs, and now they're having a run. Don't they look lovely?"

"Charming."

Richard wanted to say many things, to ask a dozen questions. They stuck in his throat. It was something new for him to be at a loss with a woman—a girl like this one, too. They stared at each other, silent.

"I'm going to bed now," she was walking slowly up the path. He noticed with relief that it led to where he stood, and she would have to go back and down some distance to avoid him.

"Bed? It's daylight still."

"Well—if it is? I'm up before daybreak."

"Always?"

"Nea*rrr*ly always. I was late this morning because it's Saturday."

She was close to him now, standing by a statue at the corner where the path joined the lawn. He didn't move towards her. He had a half fear she would run off as she had done each time before. She had to be treated like a young horse you want to get near to in a field.

"Why Saturday?"

"I do Mrs Rafferty's nails on Saturdays."

"Oh, indeed! What fun!"

His tone was sarcastic, but she did not notice it.

" Sometimes I hurt her. Then it's fun. I gave her a sore toe last time."

" So you do her toe-nails as well ? "

" Oh yes."

He was silent again. Was it, after all, such an unnatural thing for this young woman to manicure, or whatever they called it, the older one ? Why did it seem so to him ?

" I have never thanked you for those *stuccatori*," he began.

" You did. At least you didn't want me to be wet—that's the same."

He smiled at the inability to express a subtle connection.

" I was coming to thank Mrs Rafferty, and she asked us to dinner."

" She always asks people to dinner. Why do people eat so much ? Do you like food ? "

" Yes. Don't you ? "

" I like goat's milk and bread and eggs and cream. Do you like all those rich things ? "

" Sometimes. Why didn't you tell Mrs Rafferty you went for the *stuccatori ?* "

" Because—because—— "

She looked at him, hesitating, doubtful.

" Won't you, please, tell me ? "

His voice was pleading. He was humiliating himself in order to satisfy his curiosity ; inwardly he was ashamed.

" Because she said, before, I told her a lie. I never tell lies. So the next morning I didn't say anything. I left her to find out. I must take the dogs in now. Good-night."

She held out her hand and he kept it a moment, looking straight into her green eyes. Her hand felt large and strong. Her eyes did not waver from his.

" Good-night," he said, releasing her hand.

Whistling to the dogs, she walked towards the house.

CHAPTER VIII

i

GREAT efforts were made, and the second week in August saw the Kurts installed at Aquafonti. The heat had been intense.

The glassy surface of the lake became a huge reflector of searching sun-rays, its suggestion of coolness a mockery. But the busy couple toiled through the dog-days regardless of their fury. The short, breathless nights were no welcome respite, rather were they fevered preludes to the daytime labours.

They worked as though possessed by demons of energy, vying with each other in new habits of early rising, and of sketchy meals hurriedly eaten. Elinor swallowed her tea, ordered at the earliest moment her maid could serve it, then, throwing on her dressing-gown over her flimsy nightdress, she would seize her sunshade, cover her head in a blue gauze veil and proceed to the terrace, only to find Richard, with a cup of black coffee in his hand, discussing earnestly with Domenico some new garden-effect, an inspiration of the restless watches of the night.

When Elinor joined them she would link her arm in her husband's, an affectionate gesture revived from a distant past, and eagerly follow the discussion, nodding or shaking her head, emphasising a word here and there in her queer Anglo-Comacine idiom, with little jerky gesticulations and pointings.

It was as though a new intimacy had risen from the cold ashes of a burnt-out love. As their common ambition, translated into common effort, realised itself in the material thing they had created, it took for the time the place of all that they had missed in life. For Elinor Aquafonti was less a means to

an end than an end in itself. She had merged herself in the creation of something that was to reveal her innate taste. For the moment she had actually forgotten herself, the jewel, in the production of the casket which was to contain it. And in this self-bestowal she was reaping the immediate reward of the artist. Richard shared the illusion which for the time being had drawn them together, but with a cardinal difference. For Elinor, as soon as her ambition was realised, as soon as the stones and cement, the raw material, the human energy she could purchase and direct, had produced the villa and garden of her desire, the satisfaction of possessing would supersede the joy of creating ; the artist would vanish, the owner would come by her own. For her husband, whether for good or for evil, that moment would never come. Possession could in itself never give him a ray of pleasure.

The first stage in the rapid evolution of Elinor's sense of proprietorship was marked by the arrival of the Wensleydales, for which the Kurts had barely been prepared by letter from Richard's father.

The Wensleydales reached Casabianca during the last week in August. The old lord was in bad health and was returning to England by slow stages from the Engadine. Richard rowed over to call, and was received by Reggie, open-armed and joyous. His impetuous gaiety undermined Richard's resolve to hold him somewhat at a distance, the fact being that he was taken too much by surprise to consider his attitude towards the youth, who plied him with eager questions and was full of impatience to see the villa. Besides, a figure, radiating elegance, had almost simultaneously appeared, whom Reggie addressed as " Susanna " and introduced as his mother. Neither mother nor son seemed to be deeply concerned about Lord Wensleydale's health, though she alluded to the " poor dear " as having been " dreadfully ill " during the drive down, which Reggie qualified as having been " trying beyond words," and both expressed gratification that they had a doctor travelling with them.

It was late afternoon, and across the water Aquafonti stood out clearly in its new coat of paint.

Lady Wensleydale and Reggie were to be rowed over to see the villa the next morning, and the Kurts were to return to lunch with them.

" It looks too delightful over there. I can hardly wait till to-morrow," the boy said as Richard shoved off.

Elinor wanted to hear all about the Wensleydales. Lady Wensleydale was a Caryll, sister of Lord Oare, and " worth knowing." Genealogical details had little interest for Richard, and he had had much of them.

" Oh, I dare say. She's got the grand manner. Very charming and all that, but it's a bore having them on our hands, and that boy will be a nuisance if we aren't careful."

Elinor bridled.

" You took him up, I didn't. And I'm not going to freeze on him just when he can be useful."

" What use ? "

" He's got taste and—and I want to be on good terms with his mother. She knows everyone."

" As you like."

There was the sound of oars. They were sitting on the balcony that ran along the side of the house, which was built sheer into the lake.

" How d'you do ? "

The two boatmen lay on their oars, and Reggie, in evening clothes, without a hat, gazed up at them in the twilight.

They went down to the water-steps.

" I simply couldn't resist the lake. It's paradise ! All the beauty of life, of the world, came back to me on the water. I thought the horrible Swiss snow-mountains had destroyed it." He stopped and looked from one to the other ; he was still holding Elinor's hand. " There was a great light like a beacon behind you. I saw your figures on the balcony—and then— "—he dropped his voice—" I had a weird experience."

He was watching the effect of his words ; there was art in the manner. Richard suspected he was drawing on his imagination, but he listened. Elinor's face showed unusual interest.

" Out of the shadows a white figure suddenly glided by me.

Was it a lake spirit? I called out and ordered the men to pull towards it. As I did so it uttered a strange cry, like this, 'Hulloa!'"

To Richard, who knew, the mimicry was perfect. To Elinor, who didn't, it was a mere joke.

"Oh, Reggie, you funny creature! Is that all?" she gushed at him.

"It was a sort of girl," he went on, "but it might have been a boy. I asked it whether it was going to your villa, and it emitted another strange sound, like this, 'Naw.'"

He had the guttural tone exactly.

Richard laughed heartily.

"So you've encountered Donna Virginia?"

"Have I? So it's a she and a friend of yours?"

"She's one of Richard's peculiar fancies, Reggie."

"Hardly that—yet——"

Richard's tone was cold. They took Reggie into the house.

"But this is perfectly adorable!" Elinor switched on the electric light in an antique Venetian lantern above the bridge entrance. "What an inspiration to make this bridge! I'm in Venice. That's the Calle San Luca and this is the Ponte."

Elinor threw open the door and turned on another switch. A dozen lamps, some pendants, some on brackets in the hall where they stood, up the marble staircase and beyond in the winter garden, glowed simultaneously.

Reggie was genuinely enthusiastic. "But it's a jewel, the Casa Torregiani, the Trianon and the Belvedere at Miramar all in one."

"It's only half finished." Elinor stood beside him. Her bosom rose and fell. She felt real emotion, that of the gratified artist.

"And the walls marble too; and those wonderful baroque chairs against them with the green and gold brocade; and the bust. Where did you get it? But it's too wonderful of you!" Reggie went down on one knee. "*Mes hommages*, Madame," and he kissed her hand.

As Richard followed them he could not help feeling that this time Elinor had come by her own. For in all the achievement his had been the minor part. He knew that he was

utterly incapable of the thousand and one details of delicate adjustment and adaptation which Elinor mastered with intuitive skill. She had practically been her own architect and had decided on the style of decoration. In fact, he had never been able to understand how she could with her mind's eye see so clearly what she wanted when her knowledge of the different periods was so superficial. She consulted him as to the historic correctness of the particular style of each part of the house, but she seemed to grasp his explanations instinctively and so to assimilate his knowledge that, once sure of the main features, she hardly ever made a mistake.

Whenever Richard pondered over the singular completeness and unity of the villa, he wondered whether this was in reality the fruit of her mind rather than his.

She would not show Reggie the reception-rooms that evening. They were to be reserved for the next day, by which time she would have the curtains hung in one of them. The effect of these, she said, would make all the difference.

The boy went away delighted.

"Susanna *will* be thrilled," and Elinor went to bed happier, perhaps, than she had ever been in her life.

The visit of Lady Wensleydale and her son was exhaustive. Not only was everything shown that was already accomplished, but to these sympathetic hearers Elinor disclosed her future intentions in detail.

"The colour scheme is white for the hall, staircase and winter garden, with beige sun-blinds. You see, I shall get my colour from the flowers and plants. There will be azaleas and camelias in the spring, then roses, and so on. Now, in this room," as she spoke she led the way into the Empire dining-room, "I have a cream wall; this"—showing a delicate shade of reseda green silk—"is the material for the curtains."

"The Adam plaques, my dear. How delightful! And that stucco-work of laurel scrolls above them!" Lady Wensleydale was full of well-bred admiration.

They passed to the room on the right.

"So these are the curtains. What a heavenly red!" Reggie fingered the fabric. "No wonder you wanted us to

see them up. They're ideal with the old wood. And the divan—it's simply—— " He threw himself full length into it.

The *stuccatori*, on a board suspended between two ladders, were at work on the ceiling of the drawing-room, which they were covering with a delicate tracery of flowers in garlands, ribands, arrows in quivers, and other decorative conventions of the period.

Reggie looked at them wonderingly.

" The heavenly twins ! How on earth do their necks stand it ? "

" This won't be finished for ages, of course. The walls are to be toned very slightly with pink, and this will, I think, be the material for the curtains." She showed a pattern of very light pink-and-green-striped silk flecked with little baskets of flowers.

Then they were shown the boudoir. This opened out of the winter garden and was stuccoed in the Louis-Quinze style, with a picture of a court lady inset, and antique bronze gilt brackets on the walls, which were greatly admired by the visitors.

Elinor evaded inspection of the upper floor. Her bedroom, with its fixed wardrobes and mirrors, its sky-blue walls, its antique bed of hand-carved, white-enamelled wood and gilt cane, so arranged as to look in daytime like a luxurious couch, and her white-tiled dressing-room, with its porcelain bath and basin, were her particular pride. Although not quite complete, they might have been included in this private view, but she had been overhauling her gowns, and these were lying about everywhere. Richard rather wanted to exhibit his own apartment, which was across the corridor, was self-contained and had a beautiful view of the lake, but he caught his wife's eye and knew he was being warned not to give away " stable secrets."

So they proceeded to the garden. As they got outside a boatman in a white suit came towards them with his wide-brimmed straw hat in his hand. Richard thought he recognised the man, and his eye, catching sight of the gold crown in the ribbon, confirmed him.

Would the signor excuse him? He had a message for an English lady. Would it be that one? He indicated Lady Wensleydale uncomfortably, evidently puzzled to know which lady he was to address and how to do it.

Lady Wensleydale knew no Italian, but Richard quickly unravelled the mystery. Prince Franz von Hohenthal had motored down the lake to call on the Wensleydales and had been directed to Aquafonti from the hotel. He was in the launch now.

Richard went to the water-steps. A young man, with a glass stuck into one eye, lifted his hat, apologising, in good English but with a strong German accent, for disturbing him.

Franz von Hohenthal had come from his regiment to stay at Villa Carlotta for a few days, and the Prince, having heard from his kinswoman that she was at Casabianca, had asked his son to persuade her to spend some days with him.

Reggie and his mother received their friend with great delight, and, after formal introduction to the Kurts, the young man repeated his father's message, at which Elinor's face fell. It would not at all suit her that this brilliant company should be transferred to the other end of the lake. But of this there was no question, as Lady Wensleydale soon explained, owing to her husband's illness. Reggie wanted to remain at Casabianca, whence he could come across to Aquafonti and help lay out the garden.

Franz von Hohenthal's appearance in the flesh confirmed Richard's impression from the photograph his father had shown him with such evidence of affection. He was true to the ordinary type of the German aristocracy, his features were cast in a conventional mould, his hair, dark and straight, was brushed back from the forehead, which was fairly high, but gave an effect of emptiness, difficult to account for, expect that it was perfectly smooth, as though thought had been ironed out of it. His animation seemed strained, and his manners were too much in evidence, too florid, as it were, to be quite natural. He spoke English fluently but very fast, and did not always understand what was said. Richard noticed that he had a way of forcing a smile, and there was something about his mouth and its clean-shaved upper lip

that was unpleasant. He was a man who might easily be cruel, he thought, and certainly heartless.

He admired extravagantly everything he was shown, but there was a subtle suggestion of patronage in his comments. Elinor had been pointing out a bridge over the torrent-bed made of carved blocks with stone vases at either side.

" That must remind you a little of Villa Carlotta," Richard remarked. " Your father has made such perfect use of the torrent-bed there."

" Yes. But you see he had Gabriele della Rocca to advise him, and della Rocca's gardens are the finest in Europe."

Elinor was deeply impressed, and wanted to know where della Rocca was, and if it would be possible to get " a pointer or two " from him.

" You are such an artist yourself, Mrs Kurt, you don't need him. But, if you wish it, I will make it my pleasure to ask him to come here one day. Perhaps you will do me the honour of letting me accompany him. At present he is, I know, doing Friedberg's villa at Cannes. Do you know Frau von Friedberg ? She is English."

Elinor did not know Frau von Friedberg, but she had heard Olivia, of whom she had been a school friend, talk about her. If the Hohenthals knew her she must be " worth knowing," though she had never thought so before. Her husband was such a " fearful cad."

" I can't say I know her. She's a great friend of my sister-in-law."

" Oh, really ! Friedberg is colossally rich you know. Quite a good fellow. Owns race-horses and has a polo club at Frankfort."

" And she's beautiful ! " Reggie put in. " You remember her, Susanna. She came into our box at the Opera with that Portuguese, Santa Rosa. He was mad about her. Killed himself afterwards."

" Yes, yes, a lovely creature. I remember quite well. Asked us to stay with her at Cannes—the same evening, wasn't it ? I don't think we saw her again, did we ? Sweetly pretty, she was."

Something rattled. Richard turned. The noise was

caused by two heavy bangles on Franz von Hohenthal's wrist. His disagreeable mouth was curled in a self-conscious half-smile apparently directed at Elinor.

Reggie's interest was aroused.

"That's a new one, Franz. Who's the victim? Ah! Let me see, what was her initial?"

He seized the other's wrist playfully and examined one of the bangles. The young German made a show of resistance.

"That won't tell you anything."

"It has told me, but I'll be discreet. You'd better take care, Mrs Kurt, he's dangerous."

Affecting to ignore the boy's allusion, Elinor invited her guests to view the belvedere.

The little scene was not lost upon Richard. He knew his man now. Franz von Hohenthal had been playing upon a string that provokes ready response from the temperaments of certain women. The man of "successes" knows that to advertise them is a safe road to others, that nothing appeals to the vanity of the coquette more than capturing another woman's lover.

ii

September ushered in an influx from the Engadine, and within the first week the Hotel Casabianca was filled with the *élite* of North Italian society, gathered there once more before dispersing to its town and country houses at the approach of the cold weather. Amongst the earliest arrivals were Count Foligno and his wife. Foligno, as Richard had discovered when he met him at Hohenthal's, was exceptional among Italians in being a snob, but he was not an ordinary one of the Anglo-American pattern. His snobbishness was an art. Wherever he was he constituted himself an arbiter of fashion, an incarnate epitome of "Who's Who," an authority on what should be done, how it should be done, and by whom it should be done. And, where social aspirants were concerned, his was by no means a negligible authority. He made his own rules and permitted exceptions to them according to an empirical standard of his own, which, strange to say, was

nearly always adopted by those whose prestige he made it his business to exploit. His *protégés*, on the other hand, who might be old, like Mrs Rafferty, or young, like Elinor, were sure of his standing sponsor for them if their right to the privileges he secured them was challenged, so long as they efficiently played the part assigned to them in his social hierarchy. Like all great men, he sometimes made mistakes, but these he visited on the candidates who disappointed him, and then nothing could exceed the coldness of his bow and the distant civility of his demeanour. The poor victims were scrapped, and they either accepted the end of their little butterfly day with resignation, or, if adventurous, flitted to more hospitable regions.

Elinor's intimacy with the Wensleydales, which, thanks to Reggie's *empressé* manner, was apparent if not actual, and through them the evanescent but constant appearance of Franz von Hohenthal in her train, lent her an additional though fortuitous importance of which Richard quickly became aware. He had been through similar phases sufficiently often to locate the centre of disturbance and to take measures to protect himself from impending consequences. At no time in his life attracted by society sets, he was now particularly disinclined to be absorbed into the unavoidable stream of tiresome conventions, tedious amusements and petty intrigues. Therefore, as the season advanced he withdrew himself more and more, leaving Elinor free to show off the villa, to attend garden-parties and otherwise divert herself. About this time their motor-launch, a present from Uncle Frederick, ordered months before, was delivered, and this made matters easier, for it carried Elinor forth and back, and enabled him to get to other parts of the lake whenever his occupations at Aquafonti permitted, and he could excuse himself from invitations. It was a smart little boat, with its mahogany stem ornamented by a sky-blue band, its highly polished engine, its comfortable deck-chairs under the awning on a spotless rubber mat and its Union Jack at the stern. The launch was in itself an endorsement of Foligno's assurance to all his circle that Madame Kurt was the bright particular star that season, and that to be presented to her was no small

privilege. Of this privilege many availed themselves, men especially, who attached themselves to Elinor's train, content to sun themselves in her occasional smiles, while Franz von Hohenthal or Reggie alternately played first fiddle, and Baltazzo, more bibulous than ever since his displacement, hovered enviously in attendance at a discreet distance.

So the familiar atmosphere of the past enveloped Richard once more. He sank into the background, sighing relief for the shelter it afforded from everything his life had taught him to hate. It looked indeed as though he were going to outlive the " season " in comparative obscurity, and that occasional appearances at special fêtes or dinner-parties would be sufficient to keep tongues from wagging.

iii

Strangely, it was precisely the last person in Mrs Rafferty's entourage likely to be interested who first heard of her grand project. It was in the early days after their motor-launch had been delivered that Richard, having deposited Elinor at the hotel, where she had an engagement with some one of her friends, steered a course up the lake. Beyond the second basin there was a small bay which had always attracted him, when he passed, by its remoteness. The bay was formed by the spurs of the mountains which shelved right down into the lake, creating a rocky shoal dangerous to steamers. Partly because of this difficulty of approach by water except in small boats, partly, as he afterwards discovered, because only mule-paths linked the tiny fishing village to the highroad far away behind the mountains, the spot had preserved a character of complete isolation, melancholy perhaps, but intensely attractive to Richard.

This bay was now his objective, and soon the motor-launch lay just beyond the shoal water. He did not dare attempt to reach the shore, fearing to ground on the rocks and expose the daintily constructed craft to damage. After repeated shouts a boy waved to him and, a moment later, pushed off in a flat-bottomed boat which lay drawn up on the shingle.

He was a picturesque and tattered little fellow of nine, with large, intelligent brown eyes. Richard could hardly understand a word he said ; his dialect was a variant of the sufficiently difficult Comasco, but with the help of his chauffeur boatman he explained that he wanted to come ashore and, later, either to be rowed back to Aquafonti or, failing that, to be guided back by the mountain paths.

In the animated colloquy which ensued between boatman and boy Richard caught the word " signorina " several times, but little more, and was preparing to send back his launch (it had to be at Elinor's disposal that afternoon) and chance results, when he heard a voice behind him.

" Mister Kurt."

Virginia, rowing in that fashion of her own from the high rowlocks, was standing in the after part of her dinghy a few yards away. Her mouth was parted in a wide smile, she wore no hat, and her shirt was open, showing the brown throat and chest, almost the breasts. Perspiration was rolling down her forehead in great drops. She held her oars in one hand and mopped her brow and face with the other. She stood with her legs wide apart, as a man does, to get a firm footing, and as Richard glanced down he saw that they were bare below the short skirt, and he noticed the sinewy calves, the strong, straight toes bronzed and made for use like those of an athlete.

" I heard," rubbing her face and smiling mockingly at the boatman and boy, who both saluted her as one they knew well.

She said a few words to them, put her handkerchief in her pocket, and, skilfully turning her short cobby boat, brought it close alongside the launch.

" Jump in."

Richard did as she bade him.

" *Via,* Pierino," she called to Richard's man, who started his engine. The motor-launch shot away from them ; simultaneously she gave two or three swift strokes of her oars, shipped them deftly and, as the boat glided into a channel, she stood a second and, just at the right moment, jumped into the water so that she alighted with hardly a splash on the sandy gravel embedded between the rocks.

" I always wade and pull the boat in when I come here ; it's so rocky. Easier than steering her."

Richard sat on the bench amidships, she beside him, walking in the water, with her hand on the edge of the boat.

" Odd, just happening to meet you," he said. " Awfully lucky."

" Why lucky ? You passed close by me and never offered me a tow."

" You don't think I did that on purpose ? I never saw you ; you know I didn't."

" Yes, I knaw."

This time, curiously, Richard liked that " knaw," and, what was more, he was very much enjoying this experience and intended to make the most of it. What had she come to this out-of-the-way place for, he wondered, but he didn't intend to ask. This queer girl must be treated warily. If he advanced too much he knew she would retreat. What was there about her that so allured him ? He looked at her as she waded close beside him, at her brown legs in the water, at her brown arm bare to the shoulder, up to which she had rolled her sleeve. He noticed the dark down which had gold in it ; then he glanced at her face and the upper lip that had the same coloured down on it. Suddenly, for no reason that he could understand, his heart began beating violently, painfully. At that moment they reached the shore and she, guiding the boat alongside a plank placed on trestles in the water, made fast.

" Here you are. Get out. I must put on my things."

He did as he was told, saying nothing. He could not have spoken, his breath was coming in gasps, choking him. He walked slowly a few paces, pulling himself together, muttering " Damn ! Damn ! " under his breath.

A little cluster of children stood in front of him, watching, open-eyed and wondering, the arrival of these unusual visitors.

When she caught him up a minute or two later he had recovered himself.

" What made you come here ? "

She was a little in front of him. At the edge of the bay, in the elbow formed by the junction of mountain and rocky fore-

shore, there was a rough shanty, beside which two figures were evidently building or repairing a boat. She was making towards them, walking so swiftly over the boulders that Richard had some difficulty in keeping up with her.

In answer to her question he replied, " Curiosity."

She stopped short and turned round.

" What do you mean ? " There was, he thought, resentful surprise in her voice, as though his answer had offended her.

He hastened to correct the impression.

" I've passed by here often, going up the lake in steamers and lately in my motor-boat. It seemed out of the way, unspoilt. I wanted to see it."

Her face expressed satisfaction with the answer. She slowed her pace.

" I've come for Mrs Rafferty."

Richard did not betray the surprise he felt.

" She's going to give a Venetian fête. She wants boats and poles to hang lanterns on ; and she wants me to go and see the *indovinatrice* and ask her about the weather."

Richard was puzzled. He had never heard the word before, and for the moment could not grasp what she meant.

" The weather ? "

" Yes. She lives up there." The girl stopped an instant and pointed at what seemed to be the top of the mountain. " You go by that little path."

Richard followed her outstretched finger with his eyes. He could just make out a tiny path zigzagging upwards until it disappeared behind the shoulder of the mountain.

He made no comment. They walked on, and in a moment reached the spot where the men were working. These ceased hammering at their approach and lifted their hats to Virginia, greeting her by name with evident friendliness. Sitting carelessly on the side of the half-constructed boat, she began talking rapidly.

Richard's ear noted the contrast between the mellifluous Italian speech that even the Comasco patois could not spoil and her deep-chested, guttural utterance. Though he only understood an occasional word, Virginia, whose taciturnity in

English almost amounted to her being inarticulate, spoke Italian with an animation so intense, and with such a wealth of gesticulation, that he could follow the conversation with ease.

Punctuated with frequent references to objects either within sight or that had to be fetched from the shanty, such as spars, ropes, sail-cloth and so on, the talk was lengthy.

But Richard did not mind. It was enough for him that she made no objection to his presence, and that he could watch her as she spoke, that his eyes could travel over her features and form, noticing every detail unobserved.

At last the discourse came to an end.

" Signor Parlanti built my dinghy. He's the best boat-builder on the lake."

Richard nodded appreciatively towards the man, who looked inquiringly at Virginia.

" Tell him I should like him to build one for me just like yours, with those high rowlocks."

She laughed. " Oh, the rowlocks ; he doesn't make those. I'll have them cast for you in Como," and she explained what he had said in Italian.

Parlanti was delighted. Should he begin the boat as soon as he had finished Mrs Rafferty's order ? Richard nodded his approval as she interpreted.

" But you'll see that it's well made, won't you ? "

Virginia seemed greatly to approve his decision.

" Certainly I will. He always does good work. But I will have it made on a new model—better than mine."

And she began giving directions volubly. These necessitated a further rummage in the adjacent shed, whence what looked like a piece of packing-paper and a huge carpenter's pencil were produced. Of course he could not write. Virginia inscribed Richard's name and address, and the man, turning the roughly torn sheet sundry ways, added some hieroglyphics of his own and some measurements at the girl's direction.

Finally everything was arranged and, bidding the boat-builders good-bye, Virginia walked towards the path she had pointed out to Richard.

" What time is it ? "

"So late?" she remarked on his answering. "It's at least four miles up, and I promised Mrs Rafferty to be back by six."

"Does it matter?"

"Naw, not much. She'll be angry."

"But you're doing it all for her, aren't you? You can't row and walk miles in a minute."

"She doesn't know how far it is. She wants to send out her invitations, and she won't till she knows what the *indovinatrice* says."

They had reached the path and were already mounting upwards. Richard wondered how long he would be allowed to accompany her. Should he ask her permission, or had he a better chance by affecting indifference and taking it for granted? He decided on the second course. What on earth did this *indovinatrice* business mean?

"Do you mean that this person at the top is a weather prophet?"

"Naw. Not exactly. She knows everything. She will tell you——"

Suddenly she stood still.

"But you wanted to go back to Aquafonti? I had forgotten. You can take my boat. I can always get someone to row me."

At that instant there flashed through Richard's brain an intuition. Was it something in her voice, something indefinable in her manner, that suggested dimly, very dimly, that her lapse of memory was disingenuous, that she wanted him to accompany her? For an instant his eyes questioned hers. The answer was not conclusive; he must fence.

"But I want to see the—the what do you call her? I'm immensely interested."

The flagrant lie did not disconcert her. Was it possible that this girl really believed in soothsayers, or was the whole thing an elaborate pretence got up to impose upon Mrs Rafferty's credulity?

"All right; but you mustn't tell anyone—not Mrs Rafferty either. Promise." She held out her hand.

He took it, and again he looked straight into her green-grey

eyes. They did not falter. She withdrew them slowly and walked onward up the path.

Did Virginia really believe that his object in climbing that mountain with her was to consult an alleged clairvoyante? Was it stupidity or subtlety? For she could just as well have frankly accepted his company. This meeting had been accidental, and no one could condemn her for allowing him to escort her on an expedition into this remote hinterland. It was rough walking; the path was narrow and broken, in places precipitous, not at all the sort of walk any woman he knew would have faced alone. Yet somehow he could not resist the feeling that her deliberate intention was to deceive him, that she wanted him to pretend he did not know that she desired his society.

If she knew he was making the clairvoyante an excuse for accompanying her, she knew equally that she was attracting him, and she was encouraging a married man seventeen or eighteen years older than herself to pursue her. Yet her apparent *naïveté* was consistent with the almost barbaric unworldliness of her behaviour whenever he had seen her. He walked on behind her, stumbling occasionally, so that she turned round and made some chaffing remark. He had not been prepared for such a climb and was not shod for it. She had the surefootedness of the born mountaineer. When they reached a break in the path, without a moment's hesitation she jumped across the intervening gap that sloped steeply down to the torrent-bed a thousand feet below. Several times he had to depend upon her extended arm for help. After what seemed to him an unpleasantly long distance their path joined a slightly broader track and they could walk abreast.

"I'm glad that's over," he said.

"Were you frightened?"

"Not exactly frightened, but I was thinking it would be rather awkward to roll down there and find myself at the bottom with a broken leg."

She laughed. "I'd have found some men to help me carry you."

"And what would Mrs Rafferty have said?"

"*I* don't care what Mrs Rafferty says."

The words were uttered with a sort of lazy indifference.

" From what you said I thought you cared very much. You seem to be a kind of slave of hers."

" Do I ? " She said nothing more, and they were silent until she exclaimed all of a sudden : " Here we are ! "

Forked at its edge, their path had led through a wood, from which they had just emerged. Virginia went to the left and downwards. Just below them a plateau projected like a shelf. On it stood a stone building surrounded by a broken wall, which enclosed a patch of ill-cultivated soil. From above one could not have imagined that any human habitation was near, but as they descended the spot became more inviting. To reach it they had to cross a bridge of fir-trunks spanning a water-course. Down this a clear, rapid stream was splashing, and, looking over curiously, Richard saw that the building was a mill and the water flowed through it into a basin of rocks ; overflowing this, it disappeared on its way to the main stream in the valley below.

This opened out beneath them as they descended, and he realised that the site of the mill had been cunningly chosen.

With its seclusion the owner had doubtless reckoned on securing a good share of raw product from the *bergamasco* tableland above him, as well as an inexhaustible water supply. Below it, on the other side, a fair cart-track gave access to the main road, which Richard could perceive as a white streak far away across the valley.

When they reached a point which, as the crow flies, might have been fifty yards from the mill, Virginia ran forward down the zigzag path, disappearing below him.

Reaching the level ground close by the great water-wheel, he threw himself on the grass, for he was streaming with perspiration and exhausted by the long climb and swift descent.

" Hulloa ! "

She was beside him again, mopping her face with her handkerchief, and he lay looking at her, wondering what was to happen next.

" She's gone."

The girl spoke unconcernedly.

"Oh, really?"

There was nothing for him to say. She was apparently stating a fact, and he accepted it as he had accepted the rest of the situation. It was her business, not his.

"Now I'm going to wash. Come on."

He followed her to the rocky basin which, roughly constructed with stones and cement, formed the mill-dam. The sluice gate was closed and the stream overflowed and ran over it, clear as crystal.

She cast her wide-brimmed hat from her, and pulled out two large handkerchiefs, one of which she tied tightly round her hair. She went down on her hands and knees and plunged her face into the water, keeping it there, and holding her breath until she could hold it no longer, then snorting, as her lungs expelled it in great bubbles.

Richard followed her example in more sober fashion.

"Why don't you stick your head in? You haven't got long hair like a stupid woman."

She dried her face with the other handkerchief and watched him.

"How I wish I was a man!"

She pulled out a cigarette-case, in which was a wooden mouthpiece, but no cigarettes. She accepted one of Richard's.

"Why?" he asked.

"I could do what I liked."

"But you do, surely, don't you?"

"Naw. I should like to bathe now. If I were a man I could. Why don't you?"

Richard looked about him.

"No one will see you here," she said, interpreting his gesture, "and I'll go to sleep—up there."

She pointed to the wooden granary above the mill, the door of which stood open, eight or nine feet above the ground.

"You can't get up, there's no ladder."

Richard had not so completely accepted the situation as to have forgotten the object of their coming. She had not volunteered, and he had not solicited, any explanation. But he was waiting, observant. He did not mind her thinking

she had fooled him, but he did not mean to be fooled. He intended to know what her object was in this expedition, although he was quite ready to pretend anything she liked, once he knew.

" I'll show you how I can get up."

She threw away her cigarette and jumped up. He followed her.

" Put your arms against the wall—so."

She stood facing the wall, with her head down and her two forearms folded against it. He did as he was told. She went behind him, placed her two hands on his shoulders and leapt nimbly on to them, first with her knees, then with her feet. Scrambling through the hatch, she stood above him, panting a little through her wide, smiling mouth.

" Now give me another cigarette."

He threw one to her and she caught it deftly.

" What about me ? "

" But aren't you going to bathe ? It's lovely. I've often done it. You can dive, it's very deep."

" Thanks, too cold. I'd rather get up there."

" Come up, then."

She sat on her heels and held her arms over the side. He took them, finding foothold in a projection of the wall, while she hauled and, not without difficulty, he clambered up beside her.

" I always used to sleep here," she remarked in a matter-of-fact tone. " The mill was working and there was always flour in the sacks. I got white, but it shakes off. It's better than polenta flour—that sticks."

She searched about the interior and found several old sacks, which she hauled into a corner and began arranging.

" You can have the other corner."

Richard sat down on one and watched her. She was quite methodical about it. First she laid two down to lie on, then she rolled up another and laid both her handkerchiefs over it for a pillow. Finally she stood up and straightened her skirt, which had got misplaced during her efforts. It was one of the brown holland things she habitually wore, a mere apron, fastened down the front with buttons and having pockets on

either side. One of the buttons was missing, another was undone, and, as she faced him, Richard could see that she was clad in breeches as usual, and that they were made of some thin washing material. Suddenly, unaccountably, there rushed over him the same sensation he had experienced earlier. For the instant it so overwhelmed him that he thought he was about to faint and closed his eyes to steady himself.

"You're sleepy already."

She lay down on the sacks with her head on one hand, finishing her cigarette.

"If I go to sleep while I'm smoking, take care I don't burn myself. I go off very quickly."

"All right."

His voice sounded gruff in the effort to control it. He knew it would tremble if he tried to speak naturally. He was fighting hard to control himself, but he was shaking like a leaf. He rose to his feet, and pulling a couple of sacks together lay down on them. He could not take his eyes from her. Hers were closed. The hand that held the cigarette in its wooden holder was by her side. She was on her back, her hair bunched under her head and round her ears. Her breath was coming and going rapidly through her partly opened mouth, showing the teeth and just the tip of her pink tongue between them. Her throat seemed to twitch a little spasmodically. Was she asleep? The cigarette continued to smoulder; a faint spiral of blue smoke wreathed itself round her fingers . . . another moment and the holder fell from between them. He crept noiselessly forward and took it. She moved slightly; he remained where he was, crouching over her. His heart was beating convulsively, his brain seemed on fire. . . .

His breath threatened to burst from his lungs as he held it back. She half turned on her side and away from him, the hand resting on her leg opened and shut, the twitching in her throat became more noticeable. . . . Her breath came and went more rapidly. He craned over her. Her breath fanned his face. . . nearer . . . nearer . . . only the breathing became more rapid. Should he risk it? He must! He

pressed his parched mouth on her open one an instant and withdrew it . . . she made no sign . . . again . . . She moved, she was going to wake . . . her breathing became more and more violent . . . her breast rose and fell . . . she was gasping . . . her whole body was quivering. . . . He tore himself away and threw himself on the sacks.

" I've had such a funny dream."

She sat up, rubbing her eyes ; something in her voice caused a swift reaction. It seemed to have the effect of bringing back his self-control. He pulled out a cigarette and lit it, inhaling a great mouthful of smoke.

" Give me one." She felt in her pocket. " Where's the holder ? Ah ! I remember."

" It fell from your hand and I took it. Here it is."

As she fitted the cigarette into it Richard saw that her hand trembled, that her face was pale and under her eyes were dark shadows.

" When I have that dream it means something bad is coming."

Richard looked at his watch.

" Don't you think we had better be getting on now ? "

CHAPTER IX

i

Mrs Rafferty's revel was destined to become famous in the social annals of the lake. It was to be divided into several parts, of which, properly speaking, the Venetian fête was only one, though it was the last and the most sensational.

This division into set pieces had been carefully thought out, and was the outcome not only of artful study of the effect desired, but also of mature consideration regarding the social eligibility, pretension and precedence of the invited guests. These factors had to be fitted into their respective places as carefully as the pieces of a jig-saw puzzle.

She was determined that the occasion should be historic. Who can shape history at command? The attempt proved too much in the end even for Napoleon. This was to be Mrs Rafferty's Jena, not her Waterloo. So the first thing she did was to summon Foligno to her counsels, and, owing to this, Richard was informed from the beginning about the whole affair.

Foligno had been over to see Villa Aquafonti, and of all the admirers of what had been accomplished there he was perhaps the most ardent. Elinor's taste had just exactly the fashionable note that was his special aim in life, and, as soon as Mrs Rafferty informed him of her intention, he proposed Elinor as the ideal director of the decorative side of the undertaking.

So it happened that, while Richard was accompanying Virginia to find on a mountain-top a soothsayer to guarantee Mrs Rafferty's weather, Elinor was being escorted to Villa Scapa by Foligno, to ensure the success of Mrs Rafferty's scenic effects.

In the stern of Virginia's boat, which she insisted on rowing,

Richard sat watching her back as it swung rhythmically to her oars. He was thinking that her poise and the movement of her arms and body were exactly those of a Venetian gondolier.

They had run rather than walked down from the mill, not without risk to Richard, who thanked his stars when he got to the bottom.

In spite of his remonstrances, she insisted that she would row him to Aquafonti.

"What will Mrs Rafferty say? You'll be awfully late."

"I don't care. Sometimes I'm on the lake all night."

"What doing?"

"Sleeping."

He was silent for a time.

"I say, if you drop me at Terno I can walk or get a man to row me to Aquafonti. You'll be utterly tired out."

"I shan't."

"Well, do let me row."

"You can't, like this."

"Of course I can. It's not difficult. Do let me."

At last he persuaded her. He did not make a good job of it at first, but after she had shown him how to stand and what he did wrong, he got into it. Moreover, he found it a much more restful and agreeable way of rowing.

"One can see where one is going, too. Was it your idea?"

"I think so. No one else has them. The fishermen all row like that in the *batellos*, but the sides are high, so I had these cast." She was referring to the rowlocks. "I'll order a pair for you."

"So you haven't forgotten? Thanks."

"I never forget promises."

She tried to persuade him to let her row again, he went so slow.

Richard declined to give up the oars.

"You've done enough for to-day."

They were passing Villa Scapa, some distance away on their right.

"There's your motor-boat!"

At her exclamation he stopped rowing and looked where

she pointed, shading his eyes. He could only with difficulty discern his launch scudding down the middle of the broad, glistening track of molten gold between them and Scapa, behind which the sun was slowly setting. He rowed so as to intercept it and presently saw that its course had been altered.

" Pierino knows my boat. Give me the oars now. They might run us down."

" Am I such a poor oarsman as that ? " he asked, giving way to her.

Elinor, in a beflowered hat, a heliotrope dress and long *suède* globes, sat in the stern with Foligno. She nodded to Virginia with a caustic expression as the girl skilfully placed her boat alongside. Foligno lifted his hat ceremoniously. The girl nodded to them in her unconcerned way as Richard clambered in.

" You've just missed my tummy." Reggie, who had been lying at the bottom of the motor-boat on a pile of cushions, got up lazily. " Hulloa ! "

He looked at Virginia with a whimsical expression, exactly imitating her voice.

" Hulloa ! " she laughed back, recognising the imitation.

" Now we'll give you a tow back to Scapa." Richard began giving directions to Pietro.

" Naw, naw."

She stooped down, and was going to push off, when Reggie seized her arms and held her so that she was half in the launch and half out of it, her boat banging against the delicate cedar stem.

" You're ruining the boat, Reggie. Do let the girl go." Elinor's tone showed intense annoyance.

" There, you *see*," the girl said, freeing herself. With a swift stroke she cleared her dinghy and, waving farewell, rowed towards Villa Scapa, while Elinor signed to the boatman to proceed on their way.

" Where did you find it ? "

Reggie's question, saluted with a burst of laughter by Elinor and Foligno, grated upon Richard. From the moment that Virginia had woke up in the barn until now he had been possessed with a desire to get away from her. Some strange

reaction had seized him. And yet, now that he was here with Elinor and her friends, he knew that this was not the relief he courted.

He felt almost an aversion from Reggie, who began plying him with questions, much to the amusement of the others. Richard changed the subject.

" My experiences are quite uninteresting. What have you all been doing ? "

The boy saw Richard was annoyed and, with the quickness of his volatile temperament, adapted himself to the change of topic.

" My dear chap, Mother Rafferty's amazing. It's to be a comedy in three acts, with a prologue and a pantomime thrown in. First a musical tableau in the garden, next a dinner, then a *cotillon*, then a water-fête. Foligno is master of ceremonies, Elinor's the queen of beauty, and I'm Harlequin.

" What about poor Baltazzo ? "

" Oh, Baltazzo—let me see. He'll be pantaloon to Pini's clown. Pini's going to sit enthroned amidst a bevy of beautiful youths, with garlands round their heads, playing stringed instruments. Elinor's going to arrive in a palanquin, and Pini will play a violin solo to her. Franz, in full armour, will gallop up."

" No, no, not gallop. He will ride up very slowly on a white horse."

" He will ride opp veree slowlee," Reggie imitated Foligno's accent, " and then Pini will do the Swan Song and stab himself with his bow."

" No, no, not with the bow—with the dagger of the knight. He will seize the dagger from the belt of the knight while the knight kisses the princess's hand."

" Isn't it priceless ! "

Reggie lay back and screamed with delight, as Pietro stopped the engine and the motor-boat glided alongside the wooden landing-stage under the Casabianca terrace.

In the ensuing days there was much talk about the revel, and Richard got heartily sick of it. So much was Elinor taken up with her share in it that she was perceptibly less

energetic in pushing the completion of Aquafonti where, apart from the garden, much still remained to be accomplished. It was difficult to say whether this was due to the physical impossibility of doing so much at one time, or whether the new excitement had already supplanted the joys of artistic creation. Whichever the cause, the effect was that the couple gradually found themselves on the old terms. The new intimacy rapidly lessened, and with it the mutual interest that had seemed for a time to reunite them. There was no longer any excuse, as it were, for other than perfunctory intercourse. Conversation between these two there had never been since they had known each other, and, as the stimulus of a common enthusiasm waned, ground for discussion even disappeared. Each went his or her way, sometimes meeting at meals, quite as often not.

Richard's orderly nature impelled him to make a habit of consulting his wife at a more or less regular hour as to the day's arrangements. This interview took place after he had drunk his morning coffee, when her maid would inform him that Mrs Kurt was ready. This meant that Elinor had had her breakfast and was waiting to see him before getting up.

On one of these mornings he was informed that he must take part in one of Mrs Rafferty's functions. He tried hard to get out of it.

" I can't for the life of me see why I should be dragged into this particular dinner. You dine out often enough without me. Surely it's enough if I turn up afterwards."

For once Elinor showed patience. She had recently begun to realise that Richard was going his own way. And on this occasion she needed him, in fact his presence was indispensable.

" I don't think you quite realise how I'm placed. You would expose me to unpleasant comments if you didn't go to the dinner."

She lay on her side propped up on high pillows. On her head she was wearing a dainty sleeping-cap with a blue bow in front which he knew she had copied from some engraving. She always made a preliminary toilet

before he came into her room ; in fact, as their terms became more distant she seemed to pay increasing attention to her appearance on the rare occasions when he saw her in *déshabille*. He noticed her throat had changed—it seemed a shade less round. And wasn't she fatter under the chin ?

" After all, it isn't much I ask of you in these days."

For a second something gripped at his heart. He knew it was weakness, but, with all her egotism and heartlessness, there was something pathetic about this little spoilt creature for whom her fleeting youth meant so much.

" All right, dear. I'll come. But when the dancing begins I shall clear out."

" I don't want you to dance, but there'll be beautiful favours, and you might just as well ' stag ' and give them to your lady friends."

" What do you think I care for favours ? And I've got no lady friends, thank God."

" Now, Richard. What about Virginia ? "

It was said playfully, there was no intention to irritate, but Richard's voice betrayed annoyance.

" Don't begin that rot, Elinor. The girl won't be there even. I don't suppose she's ever worn a ball-dress in her life."

Elinor avoided an obvious retort, which he knew cost her an effort, and went on.

" Listen, Richard. This will be the smartest affair ever given on the lake, as Foligno says. Only what old Mrs Keyser called ' the tippety bobs ' are going to be at the dinner. All married people ; the Hohenthals are bringing the Trevisos and the Travoltas, Prince Pamilo is coming from Rome and H.R.H. from Turin."

" Where do we come in ? "

" We come in because old Rafferty can't do it without me. I'm leading the cotillion with Franz afterwards, and I've invented six figures that have never been seen before."

" Isn't that good enough without the dinner ? It will be a frightful bore, you know."

" Of course it will, but you don't see the point. The dinner

is to settle who are the leaders of society on the lake. That's the whole idea."

"Whose idea?"

"Mrs Rafferty's, of course. That's what she's out for."

"All I can say is, Mrs Rafferty——"

Richard did not finish the sentence.

ii

The day of the entertainment arrived and Fate was propitious, for it dawned cloudless.

Richard had begged off witnessing the musical tableaux, pleading the added annoyance of having to change into evening dress at Villa Scapa. Elinor departed with her maid and a box early in the afternoon, leaving him and Domenico slinging the newly arrived hammock in the belvedere at the end of the terrace, one of Elinor's latest and most successful inventions. When she proposed it her husband protested, less on account of what seemed an unnecessary additional outlay than because it was idiotic to his mind to imitate Mrs Rafferty. But Elinor insisted, saying, "You'll see," and, as he lay looking out on the lake through the foliage of a huge wisteria, cleverly trained to hang in festoons round the pillars, he admitted that once again she had "scored." If only he could stay there and dream delightful dreams instead of having that confounded entertainment hanging over his head.

He had not the remotest notion how long he had been asleep when he was awakened by Virginia's guttural "Hulloa!" and, lazily opening his eyes, he saw the girl standing beside him.

She gurgled enjoyment of his surprise.

"Mrs Kurt sent me."

Richard sat up rubbing his eyes. "Oh, really!" he yawned.

"She tried to telephone and nobody answered, so I came."

"Very good of you." He was trying to understand. So far she had delivered no message. "Try the hammock, won't you? Awfully comfortable," he said, getting out of it.

"I can't stop. She said I was to bring the pearls and come straight back."

She spoke like a child whose mother had admonished it to do as it was told.

"The pearls?"

"Yes. She said her maid must have left them on her dressing-table. She was awfully angry."

"So I imagine."

They went towards the house.

"How lovely you've made it. That's a beautiful hammock. I love hammocks."

"Um! I know. You sleep in one at Scapa, don't you?"

"Who told you?"

"I saw it." And he gave her an account of their tour of inspection under Mrs Rafferty's guidance.

"She hates it. She tries to make me sleep on that couch by her bed. I did once to please her, but she woke me up."

"Snoring, I suppose."

Virginia laughed.

"She does snore. She makes all sorts of noises. Besides, I like to be out of doors."

They had reached Elinor's bedroom. The pearls, Richard's Monte Carlo gift, lay where the maid had left them. He handed them to Virginia.

"Where do you sleep?" she asked. His bedroom was entered through a dressing-room in which there was a bath and shower installation. Virginia dawdled, fingering the taps. "What a lovely bath!" The window looked on to the extemporised bridge and the water-steps. She leant out and saw the motor-boat. "I must go. I'd forgotten. Mrs Kurt will be angry with me." She put her head into his bedroom. On the bed lay his evening clothes and shirt. "You're coming to the dinner, aren't you. She said I was to be sure to send the motor-boat back in plenty of time."

"Yes, I'm in for it. What are you going to do?"

He lingered at the bottom of the stairs, purposely detaining her.

"I'm going to look after the boats. There'll be hundreds."

"Can't the old woman's boatmen do that?"

"Good gracious! They'll be all dressed up. Besides, they've got to do the fireworks." At the bridge she paused again, while Pietro started the engine. "Don't tell Mrs Rafferty about the *indovinatrice*," she said, and ran down the steps into the boat.

He watched the boat away into the distance, thinking. He contrasted the calm friendliness of his attitude towards this girl with his previous emotion and was at a loss to explain it. How extraordinarily undeveloped she was mentally, yet she was decidedly intelligent in practical things. If the whole story of the *indovinatrice* was got up to humbug Mrs Rafferty, of course she wouldn't want it given away, but somehow he felt that she would mind much more her elderly patroness knowing that he had been with her. What was the explanation of this peculiar ascendancy? She seemed to like being treated as a child. She had even spoken of Elinor's being "very angry" with her! Was this part of a pose of general innocence? If so, it was very consistent and involved her in doing all kinds of tiresome things that one generally left to servants. And she seemed to enjoy doing them. To-day she had seemed to him like a nice boy whom an older man could make a young chum of, and if he could always feel like that to her it would be delightful. Was this difference in his feelings inspired by her, or must he look within himself for the explanation? Another curious instance of her effect on him was that, on the last occasion, every lineament in her face, every movement of her body, every detail of her manner and appearance, had been full of significance for him. Now he was conscious of no more interest in her person than if she had actually been a boy. He was completely puzzled, but anyhow he intended to see more of her, and if he got a chance that evening—— Oh, that damned dinner-party!

iii

Like many disagreeable anticipations, the dinner was not so bad as Richard had expected. He sat next to Contessa de Foligno. She bored him with a full description of the

musical tableaux, but his other neighbour was Treviso, who had a passion for art and owned a world-famous collection. The attitude of the different guests toward each other provided him with amusement. Foligno's praise of Elinor was ecstatic, and Richard noticed that Travolta paid her marked attention, and the royal incognito from Turin cast admiring eyes in her direction, while he conversed with Princess Hohenthal. The last-named interested him. She had dark, tired eyes and the manner of one whom ennui just permits to breathe. Her expression was pensive to the point of melancholy. Was she thinking of Carlo Bassi? One could imagine her a woman of many passionate loves, with tragic possibilities lurking in her background. Mrs Rafferty claimed his admiration. Completely at her ease, without in the slightest degree showing satisfaction at her triumph, she sat majestic, unmoved and bejewelled, between her two princes, as though she were some ancient queen. She spoke hardly at all, though Hohenthal appeared to be talking more to her than to the dull-looking little Principessa Treviso on his other side. Now and then Mrs Rafferty smiled slightly, amused by something the Prince said to her, but her demeanour was as aristocratically impassive as that of his own wife. In her case, too, Richard divined an under-life more fully lived than others knew or guessed. He could imagine that those eyes had witnessed licence and lawlessness in the Wild West of her youth, when men who held life cheap had fought to possess her. Under the stately, assured present there still lingered the aftermath of a stormy past.

After dinner Hohenthal and Richard strolled into the garden. The older ladies had accompanied Mrs Rafferty to her Chinese boudoir, while Foligno and Elinor, assisted by Franz von Hohenthal and Reggie, directed the arrangements of the *cotillon*.

" I always thought Mrs Rafferty remarkable, but to-night she has excelled herself. To be a hostess is a business like another, but she brings to it something individual. I'm wondering what it is. What do you think? " Hohenthal asked.

" I believe that this affair has a symbolic meaning for her. One has heard lurid accounts of her past. I'm inclined to think she's an artist unconsciously, and this is her masterpiece."

" Perhaps. All artists are builders, aren't they ? "

" My idea is, that the germ of her ambition was formed in the mining camps of California. It was behind all her actions, never lost sight of, and this is the result. The foundations of her temple of fame were laid in '49."

" I dare say you're right," Hohenthal answered, " but I don't think she is singular in that. Rich Americans are always seeking a background. They resent being born into a present without a past. I confess to sympathy with their efforts to balance cash against fate."

They were pacing slowly to and fro over the grass, smoking. At first, when they came out, they were alone, but guests were beginning to arrive, some by boat. These appeared in twos and threes, reaching the terrace from the landing-stage below. The paths were illuminated with hundreds of Chinese lanterns, and to the tops of the two great cedar-trees at either end of the lawn powerful arc-lamps had been fixed, which threw their rays over the whole front. Round these lamps clouds of moths were circling. The two men were silent a moment, watching the scene, but Mrs Rafferty was evidently still in Hohenthal's mind, for he continued :

" I'm glad to have come. I'm glad to have had a small part in the final act, it is always good to help an artist, and, after all, it's better to have any ambition than none at all." Richard thought a sigh escaped him before he added : " What do you think of Franz ? "

" A charming fellow."

" I know, but "—he gave a little cough—" has he got hold of life ? Does he think at all ? He tells me nothing, you know. Young men are strange creatures."

Richard was embarrassed. He had formed an opinion of Franz that he certainly could not express to his father.

" He is young. The more I see of youth the less I feel competent to judge."

" It's because you're young yourself that I asked you. You talk as though you were my age."

" Life isn't measured by years. Franz is twenty-two, isn't he ? "

" Twenty-four. Time he began thinking."

" Then I'm very late. I'm only beginning now."

They were interrupted by a servant with a message to the Prince from Mrs Rafferty, and he followed the man to the house, which was now brilliantly lighted from top to bottom. The windows were open and the orchestra could be heard tuning the instruments. Richard turned his back on the glare and strolled slowly downwards.

The *sbarcatoio* was brilliantly illuminated. Its deep shadows, flashes of light, groups of moving figures and boats, would have made a fine study for a painter. As each party landed, another, waiting beyond, took its place at the quayside.

The boats varied in size from the steam launch of the Duca di Pordenone, the largest on the lake, to the small rowing-boat of some Comasco worthy. For Mrs Rafferty had not been content to confine her revel to those who could aspire to a personal invitation. " Society," in its restricted sense, had been bidden to one or the other parts of the entertainment, or to a combination of the parts, according to its member's qualification. But she had gone beyond this, and had sent a general invitation to all the bourgeois notabilities of Como. For these a long wooden platform had been erected, profusely decorated with plants and flowers, lit by lanterns, with ample seats and a buffet with light refreshments at the end. Here the more dignified of the local worthies could enjoy a view of the proceedings in comfort.

Even wider had she cast her net. A welcome had been extended to all the inhabitants at her end of the lake to witness the fête from the water. Chinese lanterns were given to any who wished for them, so that the onlookers themselves contributed to the scenic effect.

As Richard approached the landing-stage he saw numbers of boats gathered in the water at some little distance from the shore.

On huge, flat-bottom barges, moored to buoys, the gaunt skeletons of fire-work devices, Catherine wheels and rockets, displayed themselves to the gaze of the curious, whose small craft clustered round them.

Richard had read of such water-fêtes in the East. Would anyone except Mrs Rafferty have risked an undertaking of this magnitude in the uncertain transalpine climate? And it now occurred to him that, after all, it was not so extraordinary that a woman of her origin should believe in occult gifts. Was she not an Irishwoman, and was not such superstition consistent with the past with which gossip endowed her? There was inherent probability in the idea. Miners are always superstitious, and she was born in a mining camp. But who suggested the clairvoyante, and where, by the way, was Virginia?

He had not long to search. Clad in a blue jersey and short white skirt, on her head a fisherman's cap, under which her hair was completely concealed, she was standing on the jetty, giving orders in short staccato sentences. He stood still and watched her. The job suited her, and she did it admirably. It was no easy one either. Without capable direction confusion would have been certain and ugly accidents probable. Guests for the *cotillon* had to be landed at a special stage, and conducted to the upward path reserved for them, while the rank and file had to be disembarked at the other end and thence directed to the allotted stand. This involved the giving of orders both precise and prompt by someone who would be obeyed. Obeyed she was with alacrity. As Richard watched, the stream for the *cotillon* slackened; nearly all the guests had arrived. One more motor-launch was approaching, head on.

"Backwater at once there!"

The white-figured boatman in the bows, boat-hook in hand, signed to the engineer; the boat moved slowly back, stern first. A moment later she called out again:

"Now go ahead."

The two men on the stage stooped, holding the side of the launch. Out of the little cabin issued the bent figure of Baltazzo. He lifted his opera hat to Virginia, and Richard

noticed that his face wore the foolish grin of one whose impulse is to guffaw. Espying Richard, he came towards him, holding out his hand.

"Why aren't you dancing?"

"And you?"

"Oh, I? I haven't danced for years. I never go to dances. I only came to this because your wife told me I must. But she says the favours are marvellous."

And his stooping figure passed on, his stupid, leering eyes on the ground.

Richard went towards Virginia, who was less busy for a moment.

"He'll tell your wife you're here, and she'll be angry," was her greeting.

"Why angry?"

"Because you aren't dancing."

The dress she wore became her well. Her jersey, cut wide round the neck, showed her strong throat and the upper part of her chest, white in the fitful light. She lit a cigarette and sat down on a neat coil of rope, disposed in case of need as on the deck of a ship.

"Where did you learn to do all this?" he asked.

"It's nawthing."

"Isn't it? I think it is something. You manage all those boats and people splendidly."

She shot a smile at him from her green eyes.

"I'm glad it's fine."

It was on the tip of his tongue to mention the clairvoyante, but something made him keep it back.

"How long will you be at this job?"

"Till the end. I like it. I can't dance, can you?"

"I have danced, but I'm tired of it. One gets tired of everything in time."

"Not out-of-doors and horses and dogs."

Two boats came up dangerously close to each other; the boatmen began swearing. She leapt to her feet.

"Break away there. You, forward. Drop back you. No swearing or off you go home. This isn't a *trattoria*."

Richard observed with amusement the men's crestfallen faces.

The incident was over ; she resumed her seat, cigarette in mouth.

" They're good when you know how to manage them," she said.

He would have remained with her if he could. Her attraction was strong upon him again, but it had taken another form. The girl really was splendid, so capable and firm of will.

" I wish I could stop, but I suppose I must go up there. When shall I see you again ? "

She rounded her lips, blowing a ring of smoke and watching it wreathing away.

" I don't know."

iv

Inevitable reaction followed the excitement of the preceding days. Elinor was nervous and irritable. Richard, urging that he had done his duty by boring himself to death at the revel, manufactured excuses for avoiding the invitations that poured in now that Elinor's position as a leader of fashion was assured. This led to scenes that did not sweeten their tempers. Another source of irritation for Elinor was the unfinished state of the villa. She had counted on giving a sort of wind-up party at Aquafonti, but this was out of the question, with workmen still in the house. Baraldi was " damned " more than ever. Meanwhile the season waned. People began departing, the Wensleydales among the first. Reggie pleaded hard to stay, but his father's health had become critical ; he had to be got home, and to this urgency even such selfishness as the boy's had to give way.

Richard spent most of his time exploring the lake in his motor-boat. He was possessed by a spirit of unrest, Elinor said.

" I suppose you're tired of the villa before it's even finished. You always do get tired of everything."

" I've not noticed that you're there much," he retorted.

And so the days passed.

If Richard at this time was tired of the villa itself he was unconscious of it. He was well aware that he was living amidst beauty, in a villa of his own choosing, surrounded by all that their combined taste and his father's money could procure to enhance its attractions. Yet he had never been so profoundly conscious of the utter uselessness and emptiness of his existence. He was always alone. Several times he had thought of going to see Hohenthal. Once he started with that intention, only to change his mind when he was within a few minutes of the Villa Carlotta. Turning about, he journeyed feverishly up the lake to Luca, where he lunched at a little *trattoria*. He could not have explained why he was not in the mood to see Prince Hohenthal, but he knew that his was not the society he needed. He wanted to get away from thought. Thinking requires some degree of placidity, and he was on edge. He would have been at his worst with a man of Hohenthal's temperament, cool, aloof and detached. He was hungering for flesh-and-blood sympathy, not for intellectual stimulation. No man he had ever known could help him ; a woman perhaps might. What woman ? Where was he to find her ? He ran over in his mind the women he had met during the past weeks. Was there a single one of them to whom, even if it were possible, he could say—say what ? I want love, I want all the tenderness of your heart. I want to give you mine. It's there to give.

What would those fine ladies say to that ? It would indeed be a new experience for them. Was there one of them who wanted love herself or had it to give ? They didn't look like it ; they didn't act like it ; perhaps some of them cared for their husbands or lovers. They didn't seem to. Perhaps they loved their children. Why hadn't he got a child ? With bitterness his thoughts flew back to forgotten days. He threw himself into his boat and told the man to start the engine.

A long, shrill whistle, then another.

He was sitting in the bows, steering straight down the middle of the lake, his eyes fixed on the point ahead. He

looked in the direction of the sound. Half-a-mile away on his left, close in to the shore, under the shadow of the projecting mountain, he could see a white figure standing in a boat. His heart throbbed. It was Virginia. He threw the wheel round and made straight for her.

As his launch sped along he suddenly realised that he was approaching the little bay of the boat-builders. How could he have forgotten? The boat must be nearly built by now. He might have made it an excuse for meeting her. What a fool he had been not to think of it. He had often wondered what she was doing. His spirits rose. What a piece of luck!

She was moving towards the shore with easy, vigorous strokes.

"Hulloa, Virginia, this is splendid. Mayn't I come into your boat? It's just the same as last time, my motor is wanted. Extraordinary coincidence."

"I've got the rowlocks. Here they are." She let go of the oars and held up the shining metal things. "That's why I whistled."

"I'm damned glad you did."

She laughed in her peculiar way and pulled her boat close.

"All right, get in."

As he put in a foot she gave a stroke with one hand, so that the two boats separated and Richard, losing his balance, almost fell into the water. As it was, one leg went in, and he saved himself with difficulty.

"You naughty girl. You did that on purpose."

She laughed boisterously.

"That's to punish you for not seeing about your boat."

Richard would gladly have gone in head first to find himself where he was.

"Can you take me home if I send my boat away?"

She nodded, and he gave his order to Pietro.

The dinghy was finished but for varnishing, and he expressed himself delighted with it. She showed him where he could step a small mast.

"She's wide in the beam and has a good keel. But you must look out for squalls. They come suddenly."

He was to come and fetch it a few days later. She needed two coats of varnish, Virginia said.

"Now let's go for a walk," he suggested.

"Not far. Mrs Rafferty needs me."

"Let her wait for once. To-day it's my turn."

They took their way towards the path of his former experience, chatting as they went.

He liked her better, far better, than he had ever done before. She was full of fun and mischief, playing all sorts of little jokes on him. All pretence of formality was abandoned and they chaffed each other like schoolboys. His bitterness of the hour before melted away, every moment he felt happier.

"I didn't know you were like that."

"Like what?"

"Jolly. I thought you were always serious."

"No sense of humour, you mean?"

She looked puzzled.

"I don't understand that word. I thought you only liked to talk to clever people about all sorts of difficult things."

"I hate clever people. I love laughter and playing the fool."

"Do you really? Mrs Rafferty hates jokes. She says ladies never make jokes."

"That's true. What sort of jokes do you like?"

"I don't know. Like children."

They sat down on a low, moss-covered wall. Instead of taking the upward path, she had led him past it to the stream, which at that season was low and murmured by them between great rocks.

"I wish we could often be together like this."

"Would Mrs Kurt mind?"

"I shouldn't care if she did."

"There's no harm, is there?"

"Harm? Of course not. I need a pal."

"I know that word. Munro says it."

"Who's Munro?"

"Mrs Rafferty's son. He's coming next week."

"Oh!"

The news was not welcome. Richard wondered what sort

of a man this Munro Rafferty was when she broke in on his thoughts.

"He's divorced."

"Oh!"

"In our religion one can't divorce."

"Oh, of course. You're a Catholic." Religion played such a small part in Richard's life that he never thought about it. Certainly he had never considered it in connection with this girl. "Are you very strict?"

"Not very, rather. I fast and go to confession."

"Oh!"

"Why do you always say 'Oh!'?"

"Because I'm stupid, I suppose."

He began talking about other things, and they got up and strolled slowly back to the shore.

V

Gradually and quite naturally Richard's casual acquaintance with Virginia ripened into as close a companionship as circumstances permitted. To some extent, indeed, circumstances favoured it, for Virginia's disposition and way of behaving lent themselves to freedom of intercourse. Her habit of assuming that people regarded her as an overgrown child, and her willingness to undertake any sort of service, disarmed the censorious and appealed to those, like Elinor, who got into the way of making use of her.

The girl soon began popping in and out of Aquafonti at any odd moment to see if she was wanted for an errand. Sometimes she arrived by boat, sometimes on her bicycle. At such times she always asked first for Elinor. Did Mrs Kurt "need" her for anything? And Mrs Kurt generally did. Could Virginia row the *batello* into Como and bring back that armchair from the upholsterer's, or would she mind bicycling to So-and-so's villa to say that Mrs Kurt would be delighted to go to tea that afternoon. So frequent were her appearances that Richard got accustomed to looking out for her. As soon as he got out of bed, if the morning were fine, he would look

up the lake towards Scapa from his bedroom window to see if he could make out her white figure rowing in the distance. He even resuscitated an old field-glass and kept it by him for the purpose. More than once she arrived without his knowing it, and he found her working in the garden with Domenico, or helping Pietro to wash the boats. She became familiar with all their domestic arrangements and at meal-times always found an excuse to disappear, in spite of repeated invitations to stay.

With the autumn rains her tasks became more formidable. Camellia and azalea trees of huge size had to be found, taken up and transported to Aquafonti, where Domenico, with a gang of labourers, planted them under Elinor's directions. This was at times rather exciting. It was no small undertaking to unload them from the *batello* and carry them to their destination. Virginia was wholly at home at this work, which she evidently enjoyed.

The men laboured with a will for her, much to the satisfaction of Elinor, whose enthusiasm was rekindled by this landscape gardening enterprise.

In these large-scale operations Richard had to take a hand. At first Virginia went alone on her voyages of discovery, for it was by no means easy to find trees of the size wanted. Long familiarity with the gardens and plantations round the lake was indispensable, but besides this the owners had to be approached by someone who knew how to deal with them and to drive a shrewd bargain. Sometimes cash had to be displayed and a written contract signed. Virginia explained this, and at the same time confessed that she was not up to carrying out that part of it by herself. It went, therefore, as a matter of course that Richard should accompany her on such occasions, an arrangement quite approved of by Elinor whose garden was taking shape amazingly under the new impetus. Baltazzo, among the few of her friends still lingering on the lake, and a frequent visitor, said it would be far more *chic* than Mrs Rafferty's.

Henceforward it became an accepted rule that Richard and Virginia should go off together in the motor-launch or rowing-boat, according to the distance of their objective. Some-

times they were away from early morning till late in the afternoon. Richard, on such expeditions, carried sandwiches, but, as often as not, goat's milk and polenta would be provided by the peasants whose trees they bought, or they would lunch at some wayside *trattoria*. Occasionally they went by road, in which case he hired a motor in the town ; or if they intended, as they generally did, bringing plants back with them, Virginia borrowed a country cart from the Peraldi farm and drove it herself. As the mule that drew it was old and obstinate, this was a slow business, which to Richard was no disadvantage. In fact he blessed the old mule and preferred that mode of travel to any.

During these excursions Richard had learnt much about Virginia's life. Her father was old and a confirmed invalid. There were two sisters besides herself, one of whom was married and lived in their house at Milan. The other was at Casana with her mother, who, he gathered, was rather a curious and incalculable person. Virginia seemed to be devoted to her father, but apparently since his illness, which had been long and painful, her mother had taken the reins, and it was on this account that the girl for nearly a year past had been living with Mrs Rafferty. Contessa Peraldi was of foreign origin, Swedish, Virginia thought, but she was quite vague on the point. What mattered was that they did not get on together. She avowed frankly that her mother disapproved of her. The Contessa wanted her to dress up, Virginia said, and pay calls. She didn't like her clothes or her dogs. For these Virginia was always fighting. She assured Richard that her mother tried to poison them.

" They know it. Boso bit her once, he hates her. She's awfully frightened of him."

Richard, recalling the huge animal's formidable appearance, was not surprised.

" He's as gentle as gentle. He takes care of the babies at the farm."

How far Richard at this time realised the influence of these happenings on his mind it is difficult to say. He certainly believed he was interested in the operations he was undertaking, for themselves, though he was aware of the increasing

enjoyment he derived from Virginia's company. But quite as certainly he was ignorant of the hold her companionship had taken upon him. He accepted the unusual situation as normal.

The very innocence of the affair, for an affair it was, whether he chose to consider it so or not, was in a way its insidious danger. In taking her as she was, in regarding her as he might have regarded a boy, whose youthful companionship was inspiriting and congenial, and called for no intellectual effort, he was accustoming himself insensibly to a stimulant as dangerous as opium. He must have known that his outlook had changed, for he was in buoyant spirits, and the days flew by.

On a particular morning Richard scanned the lake eagerly with his glass. It had been pouring wet for two days and Virginia had not turned up. Elinor was put out because the planting had to be suspended, and, though he had kept out of her way as much as he could and tried to read, the time had hung heavily on his hands.

But the wind had changed ; it was a clear, beautiful day, with just the slightest touch of frost in the air ; one of those wonderful mornings which in October warn you that winter is coming.

She must surely come to-day, he was thinking, but there was no sign of her, and he thrust his glass impatiently into its case.

The morning dragged slowly by. Half-a-dozen times he had walked to the top of the garden. She might have come and be helping Domenico in the *bosco*. Each time he was disappointed. He cross-questioned the gardener's wife, who lived at the lodge at the top. Had she seen Donna Virginia pass by on her bicycle ? She might have gone to the Devolis, would she please look out and telephone down, Mrs Kurt had something important to see her about. An examination of Pietro ensued. Was he sure the signorina had not passed by in her boat ? Yes, positive, the signorina had not passed.

Finally luncheon was served.

Richard's impatience was not lost upon Elinor. He was never good at keeping his feelings to himself.

"You seem so upset about her not coming, why don't you telephone?"

"I promised her not to telephone to Scapa unless she called me up," he answered.

"Why not? I should like to know."

"Because of old Rafferty, I suppose."

"What is it to do with her?"

"She lives with her, practically. You know that as well as I do."

"She hasn't got a monopoly of her. Other people find her useful besides Mrs Rafferty. Selfish old beast."

Richard by no means underrated the value of Elinor's alliance, but he was inwardly amused by her point of view. That was the measure of her appreciation of Mrs Rafferty's consideration towards her. It was characteristic.

The moment they finished lunch Richard went out on the balcony of the library.

"By Jove! here she comes."

The eager words escaped him involuntarily.

"How relieved you must feel!" Elinor's tone was sarcastic.

"Well, aren't you? You said you had a hundred things you wanted her to do."

Elinor turned her head without replying.

Meanwhile Virginia was within hailing distance. She was rowing her dinghy, and in the bows was the great form of Boso, sitting on his haunches.

"I haven't come to stay," she shouted.

He waited till she came closer.

"Where have you been?"

"I've left Scapa."

She spoke quickly, but there was significance in her voice.

"What?"

"I've left," she repeated.

"Why?"

"I'll tell you another time. I can't stop now. Mrs Rafferty's coming to see you this afternoon. You can telephone to Casana." She was turning the boat as she spoke,

but Elinor, who had heard the conversation, appeared on the balcony.

"How do you do, Virginia? What's this about Mrs Rafferty?"

Virginia didn't answer. She gurgled and looked at Richard.

"I suppose you've had a row with her?" he said.

She nodded.

"And what is she coming here for?"

There was menace in Elinor's tone.

"Because—because—— Oh, I don't know. She's verry angrry."

"Is she? She'll have to get over it, then." Elinor went back into the house without saying good-bye to her.

Richard regarded Virginia with a set face. She turned round and waved to him once, then continued on her course to Casana. He watched her white figure till it disappeared.

CHAPTER X

i

Richard was not in an amiable frame of mind. Elinor and he had hardly exchanged views, but from the acerbity of her comments on what she called Mrs Rafferty's "tyrannical behaviour" he knew that she was thoroughly put out and prepared to be nasty. He was glad of it. When Mrs Rafferty appeared, a couple of hours later, Richard was left to receive her alone.

The old lady sat grimly in the stern of her motor-boat and received Richard's bow and his arm with cold hauteur.

"So that's her line," he thought. With icy politeness he conducted her to the library. Ignoring the settee and the comfortable chairs which he in turn offered her, she seated herself with impassive dignity in a great, straight-backed Gothic affair which had once been used by an abbot. This was an adroit proceeding, for it enabled her to sit higher than anyone in the room.

"Where's your wife?" she asked from her coign of vantage.

"In the garden somewhere, I believe. I told them to let her know you had called."

"I hope she won't be long. What I have to say I want to say in her presence."

"I trust it's nothing serious." Richard put as much sweetness into his voice as he could command.

"I don't know what you consider serious, Mr Kurt. Your scandalous behaviour is the talk of the lake, and I've come here to inform your wife of it."

She had thrown down the gauntlet with a vengeance. Richard now knew where he was. For once he kept his temper, realising quickly that in dealing with a woman like Mrs Rafferty politeness was his best weapon.

" You are engagingly frank, Mrs Rafferty. May I ask what I have done? "

She had been looking straight before her at the door. Instead of a hat she wore a voluminous veil round her head, which shaded her pallid face and swathed her throat. She thrust this back and looked at him with concentrated hatred in her screwed-up eyes.

" You have been doing your best to ruin the reputation of a young girl whom you met in my house, the daughter of old friends of mine. If she belonged to me I should tell my son to shoot you."

Richard got quite cool. A threat of violence was less likely to anger him than anything she could say.

" Pardon me, Mrs Rafferty. But it seems to me you are acting as though the young lady very much belonged to you. Perhaps you will tell me what your precise status is in the matter. Otherwise I fear I must decline—— "

" Decline as much as you please." She interrupted him without raising her voice. Her tone was level and unemotional, the only outward sign of her rage being revealed by her mouth, a harder, thinner line than ever. The intensity of her resentment communicated itself to him, her whole being seemed to be absorbed by it. She was not angry; she was anger itself. He knew that this was a duel between them over Virginia, in which one or the other must be permanently disabled, and he was quite determined that he was not going to be that one. " You shan't ruin that girl; you shan't take her away from me."

" Take her away from you, Mrs Rafferty? Is she not a free agent? Free, white and twenty-one, as Elinor would say? "

" What would Elinor say? " It was she herself who came into the room and asked the question.

Mrs Rafferty did not move; she did not attempt to greet Elinor, who stood by the door with her hand on the handle, looking from one to the other.

" I've told your husband what I think of his behaviour. I meant to speak to you first, but as you left him to receive me—— "

" Really, Mrs Rafferty, do you expect me to be waiting all day on my doorstep in case you happen to call ? "

" I'll tell you what I do expect, Mrs Kurt. I expect that you should keep an eye on your husband and stop him carrying on with an unmarried girl If you can't stop him, I can."

From Elinor's expression, as she looked at him, Richard knew Mrs Rafferty's shaft had gone home. Whether she cared or not, she didn't want a scandal, and this was now hanging over her head. He had been sitting on the settee. He now got up and moved towards the door, where Elinor still stood.

" I think I'd better leave you two ladies to discuss this matter, it seems to be one that a man is not competent to deal with."

Leaving the room, he quietly closed the door behind him, and called to Pietro to bring out the motor-launch. A minute later he was steering for Casana.

He was shown into a room on the ground floor. Apparently that part of the house had only just been built, for it was in disorder, and smelt of new plaster, while the walls were damp.

Brigita Peraldi, a handsome dark girl of about twenty-five, came in after a few minutes, hot and out of breath, with a tennis racket in her hand, which she threw on the floor, and shook hands with him cordially. She expressed her regret that her mother could not see him owing to her constant attendance on her father.

Richard was a little at a loss. He had come prepared to set forth the whole position to Contessa Peraldi, and to leave himself in her hands. His conscience was clear. Possibly he had been injudicious, although Virginia's disposition and actions were so habitually unconventional that he could not blame himself. Anyhow, frank avowal of all the circumstances was, he felt, the best policy. He had been introduced to Donna Brigita at Casabianca and had spoken a few words to her on several occasions. She had made the impression upon him of being an easy-going, rather reckless young woman, inclined to scoff at life and at people generally. She had asked him to call at Casana and to waive ceremony,

expressing the hope that Mrs Kurt would not expect them to call, owing to her father's illness. It had occurred to Richard that she was not at all sorry to have an excuse for avoiding a social formality, and that she would be pleased if he came alone. She spoke English fluently, with an accent like Virginia's, but her voice was softer, and her manner, though rough for an Italian, was more feminine than her sister's.

" Why didn't you bring your racket? We might have had a game. I've been trying to play with Virginia, but she won't try. She's a funny girl."

She laughed in a chirrupy way.

" I'd like to awfully another time, though I'm utterly out of form." Richard was wondering how much he could, and ought to, say to her.

" We can't play a bit. Why not have a game now? We've got some rackets; they're rather rotten. Do you mind? "

" Not a bean. What about shoes? "

" We play without. The court's rotten, so's the net, so's everything."

She led the way out through the window, lighting a cigarette as she went.

Richard followed rather uncertainly, trying to get his bearings and anxious to say something, he hardly knew what or how.

" What a ripping motor-boat you've got. Virginia says it's the fastest on the lake, except—— "

" I hope you'll often come out in it."

" You bet I will if you give me the chance. Hulloa, Virginia! "

Her sister came towards them and held out her hand to Richard. She, too, was smoking.

" Did *she* come? " she said.

Richard looked at Brigita.

" *She* knows," with the low gurgle.

" She abused me like a pickpocket. Said I was ruining your reputation and—er—lots of other pleasant things."

Both girls stood listening, evidently amused, and not at all upset.

" So," he went on, " I thought the best thing I could do was to come here and see your mother and explain—— "

The sisters simultaneously burst out laughing. Virginia stopped first and touched his arm lightly.

" Don't be silly. Who cares what Mrs Rafferty says ? "

So little did Brigita care, apparently, that she was too impatient to hear any more and began hitting the balls against the net, which was full of holes.

" Come on and play. Damn Mrs Rafferty !" she called out.

" And so say all of us." Richard took up a racket as he spoke, while Virginia sat down on a bench at the end of the court and lit another cigarette.

When he got back to Aquafonti from Casana Richard found Elinor in one of her worst moods. She was dressing, and reminded him that it was dinner-time and Baltazzo was coming.

" You seem rather pleased with yourself," she remarked viciously.

" Why shouldn't I be ? I've had a couple of hours' jolly good exercise and a dip."

" Have you ? In the meantime you landed me with that old devil. She intends making it hot for you, let me tell you."

" And what d'you think I care ? "

" No, I don't suppose you do care if my position on the lake is ruined."

" By Mother Rafferty ? What rot ! "

" Is it rot ? She's going to see Contessa Peraldi. You don't seem to realise that we're mere strangers—in society on sufferance—while the Peraldis are intimate with everybody, and everybody will take their side."

" Their side ? What d'you mean ? Society be damned ! And as to the Peraldis—— " He whistled softly and went out of the room.

Elinor's reticence during dinner about the incident of the afternoon amused Richard greatly. He said nothing to enlighten Baltazzo, but plied him relentlessly with champagne until he thought him tuned to the right pitch. Then he started the ball rolling.

" What do you think of old Rafferty coming here and kicking up a row because the Peraldi girl and I have been going after trees together? " and he gave Baltazzo a short account of the matter.

Baltazzo blinked across the table, first at Elinor and then at him. He hadn't taken it in yet.

" She's going to tell her son to shoot me, Ugo, because I've taken Donna Virginia away from her."

This was too much for Baltazzo.

The vacant look gave way to one of amazement, then of hilarity; all of a sudden he held his napkin up to his blubber mouth and began roaring with laughter.

Elinor looked at him with angry surprise.

" Where's the joke? I can't see it. You wouldn't laugh if you were looking down Munro Rafferty's revolver barrel. You don't know Americans, let me tell you."

With a violent effort Baltazzo controlled himself, and, noticing Elinor's anger, did his best to " come to heel."

" But, my dear, even an American wouldn't shoot a man because he—because his mother—— Please excuse me," and again his napkin went up, and he laughed until the tears came into his eyes.

Richard observed that it was slowly dawning upon Elinor that there was some point in Baltazzo's mirth, but she was too angry or too stupid to grasp it.

" Can't you understand? "

" No, I can't."

" Well, I can't explain it to you. Get Ugo to, afterwards. Meanwhile, let's have coffee outside."

They rose from the table and Baltazzo gradually subsided. Much to Richard's satisfaction, their guest offered his arm to Elinor, and they walked off together to the end of the terrace, where Richard could see him standing in front of her, gesticulating.

ii

Richard soon became *persona grata* at Casana. He early made the acquaintance of Contessa Peraldi and, in spite of her

peculiarities, rather liked her. But she used the wrong method with her children, whom she tried quite unavailingly to manage as though they had not long since emancipated themselves. Each girl went her own way, and though, as far as Richard could judge, there was not the slightest harm in what they did, the suggestion of control was irksome, while any attempt on their mother's part to enforce it led to violent scenes. These occurred with frequency and were horribly unpleasant, though the Contessa tried not to lose her temper in Richard's presence.

He was very conscious at this time of the considerable part the Peraldis played in his life. Thanks to them and their small circle of younger people, he enjoyed some happy days that October, sailing, playing tennis and picnicking. He was only too glad to throw himself with zest into their pursuits, and to make the most of their careless atmosphere in exchange for the dreary joylessness of the life he was accustomed to. It was the dead season. The hotels were empty, or nearly so, and only those remained who lived permanently, or semi-permanently, on the lake.

The planting was still going on, but the heaviest part had been done, and Elinor began making winter plans. It was out of the question to remain in the villa after the planting was finished. What did Richard propose they should do? He had no suggestion to offer, and when his wife hinted at Paris he made no objection. For himself, he intended to remain at Aquafonti; as to that his mind was made up.

His sudden intimacy with the Peraldi family had come, at first, as a surprise to Elinor. But when, a few days after Mrs Rafferty's attack on Richard, Contessa Peraldi came across and left cards, she was pleased; and Richard noted with amusement that she ordered out the launch and proceeded to Scapa the very next day. He wondered what his friend the enemy had said, for Elinor returned in high good humour. But he asked no questions, being only too thankful to be left in peace.

Towards Virginia his feelings at this time underwent a gradual transformation, so gradual that he was unconscious

of it. Little by little the girl became more than a jolly companion, more and less than a friend.

At first he had not talked to her of himself at all, but as time went on he spoke more and more freely to her. She told him, during this period, a great deal about herself. He discovered, rather to his surprise, that she was intensely religious. Once she disappeared for several days. Brigita said she had gone to Milan to stay with her married sister, but on her return he learnt, with a certain dismay, that she had been in " retreat " at the convent she was in the habit of visiting. He did not venture to question her about this, and was unable to make certain how far it was a voluntary act of self-mortification or an atonement prescribed by her confessor. As to this side of her he was not merely doubtful ; he was uneasy. He had known many Catholics, but he had never reached intimacy with any Catholic woman to whom her religion meant what it apparently did to this girl. For the time it even checked the growing intimacy, but that was his act, not hers. He began asking himself how far it was right for him to allow this friendship to go. Was she deceiving herself, and doing what her faith would condemn, by this association with himself ? Was it possible even that he was teaching her duplicity ? And yet their intercourse seemed to him wholly innocent. She sometimes went off to Mass at daybreak, but she was quite as willing to go for a long ramble or a sail with him afterwards. Her allusions to confession or to Mass indicated devotion to her spiritual duties, but this devotion did not seem to interfere with her temporal enjoyments. The only thing that still troubled him in this connection was the apparent tenderness, to him inexplicable, she felt for the nuns in the convent. She was quite open about the attraction they had for her, but he was doubtful whether this was as entirely spiritual as she seemed to imagine. She certainly spoke at times about entering the convent herself. At first horrified at the bare thought of what to him was the most dreadful of fates for a young woman, he afterwards took her references to the subject more coolly, because from something her mother let slip he felt fairly certain that this was a

threat kept up her sleeve for use when her liberty was interfered with.

After Richard's visits to Casana had become frequent there was an unspoken understanding between the two girls and himself that he should go to the far end of the garden, which was a large one, so as to avoid Contessa Peraldi. At first he was rather uncomfortable about this arrangement. " Mother would be furious if you caught her when she was untidy," Virginia said.

That there was some truth in this he knew, for on one occasion he had come upon the Contessa in very exiguous garments, and, though she had promptly disappeared and he had pretended not to see her, he was certain the encounter was unwelcome. All the same, he knew that their real reason for this surreptitious, though undefined, understanding was that his comings and goings should not be noticed. He observed in Brigita, as in Virginia, this odd mixture of frankness and something for which he could not find a name. Without being exactly hypocrisy or disingenuousness, it was a sort of make-believe compounded of both, at once less crude and more subtle than either.

He perceived this characteristic in talking with Virginia about the nuns.

They were walking through a wood above Casana. Her mother, she said, was " in a fearful temper," and had locked her in her room.

" You managed to get out all right, I see."

" Yes, through the window. I slid down the water-pipe."

" Very foolish. You might easily have injured yourself. Your mother would have unlocked the door in a few minutes."

" Would she ? You don't know her. She'd have kept me there for a week if she could. She said, through the door, she wished I would go into the convent ; it's the only place for me."

" And what did you say ? "

" I said I would some day, if—— "

Richard waited, but she didn't finish the sentence.

" Look here, Virginia "—he sat down on a fallen tree—" let's talk about this a minute."

She sat down beside him.

" Well ? " she said.

He was careful to avoid any touch of banter in his tone.

" You don't seriously think of such a thing, do you ? "

" Why do you ask ? "

" Because I care. Because to my mind it's the most ghastly thing a young creature like you can do. I had rather see a girl I was fond of go to the devil—I'd rather she were dead."

" The nuns are awfully sweet. You don't know how nice they are. I'm happy when I'm there."

" Happier than you are when you're free to do what you like ? "

" I'm not free. I'm always interfered with. You're the same as Mrs Rafferty. She hates the nuns."

" That's the best thing I've heard about Mrs Rafferty yet. It shows she really cares what becomes of you."

" Mrs Rafferty knows I'm useful."

" You can't believe that's the only reason. I don't exactly love Mrs Rafferty, but—— "

She looked at him with such a curious expression that he did not finish the sentence.

" I think I'll go back to Scapa."

Richard was taken aback by the reply. What was the chain of reasoning ? He looked at her intently, trying to find an answer to his thought. Her eyes were on the ground. Under his gaze she fidgeted a second, then looked up at him with a smile.

" Give me a cigarette," she said.

As they smoked in silence Brigita approached them through the wood.

" Mother's looking for you."

" She can look. I'm going back to Scapa."

" Isn't she a fool ? " Brigita asked Richard.

" I don't know what to say. I suppose she knows best what she wants to do. I can't judge."

It began to rain, and they turned towards the farm, which lay some little distance below, between them and the house.

The path ran by a field where the hay had been cut. At the corner stood one of the small stone barns common to that mountainous country, where the work is done by men and women, with an occasional donkey or mule.

Virginia went towards it and begun pulling at a rope which had been carelessly left hanging from the small entrance, made just high enough to pitch the hay through.

" What are you going to do ? " Brigita asked.

" I'm going in there while it rains. You can go to Casana. I shan't."

The rope was attached to a small ladder up which Virginia ran.

" It's lovely up here in the warm hay," she shouted down.

Brigita had walked on some steps and, looking back while Richard hesitated, called out to him : " I think you had better not come to Casana. Stay with Virginia if you like. I shall tell mother I couldn't find her."

" No, I'll get on home. I don't mind the rain." Richard waved his hand to Virginia, who made no reply and hauled in the ladder.

iii

As Richard's intimacy with the Peraldi family increased and his absences from Aquafonti became more frequent, Elinor grew restive. She did not by any means tamely accept a situation which " let her in " for the rôle of the neglected wife without the compensation of her usual suite. Baltazzo hardly counted in this respect. His docile attentions, long ago taken for granted, had become tedious, and he was of little or no use on the lake, where in the dead season there was nowhere to go and nothing to do outside the villa.

Virginia had abandoned her announced intention of returning to Scapa and had renewed her visits to Aquafonti. With the arrival of the cold weather planting and other outside operations ceased, consequently there were no demands on her services. It became evident, therefore, that her presence was due to Richard's pleasure in her companionship, and this

soon called forth allusions from Elinor which increased in expressiveness as time went on.

Richard began by ignoring ironical references to his changes of taste. The " Vassar prig " had receded into the past, his " cow-girl " friend now took her place. Even pointed and uncomplimentary remarks about Virginia's appearance, dress and features failed to arouse his resentment. He was conscious that Elinor's life at this period was not amusing, and he would have been only too glad to have provided her with congenial companionship. He hardly made a pretence of interest in the villa and its embellishment now that the fetching and planting of trees no longer afforded an excuse for expeditions afield. Virginia had already become an important element in his life, but he had no intention of allowing himself to be drawn into an overt declaration which might result in a definite breach with Elinor on her account. He did not at this time know how far the girl's hold on him went, for he certainly believed he was entirely a free agent in the matter, and he would probably have laughed at anyone who suggested that he was under a spell he could not break. But when one day Elinor told him that Munro Rafferty was coming to see him he went to pieces.

" If that fellow dares to speak to me about Virginia I'll kick him out of the house, and what the devil do you mean by conspiring with him behind my back ? "

Elinor had the best of the argument with a smooth answer uttered in a rather pathetic manner, as of one saddened and misunderstood.

" He telephoned to you, but as you were at Casana I answered."

Richard was unappeased.

" Considering the terms I'm on with his mother it's a piece of infernal impertinence for him to come here."

" You seem to forget that I have not dropped a woman who has shown me a great deal of attention because she disapproves of your behaviour."

" No, exactly. That's just like your damned disloyalty."

" Disloyalty indeed ! You're a nice one to talk. You go gallivanting off with your cow-girl with her cod-fish mouth

and her stupid baby talk, leaving me here alone for days together. Disloyalty! Pah! You don't know the meaning of loyalty. You never did."

She put an end to the scene by slamming out of the room in the old way.

When Munro Rafferty called, he was shown into the library, where Richard sat awaiting him, reading the paper.

Mrs Rafferty's son was a rather pleasant-faced man of about Richard's age, with a high colour and a strong Californian accent, which years of life in Europe had not rubbed off. He began by politely excusing himself for coming to see Richard under the circumstances, alluding with regret to the incident of his mother's visit. He expressed himself with some difficulty and was obviously embarrassed. Richard began to feel sorry for him, especially when he went on to speak of his having taken upon himself to represent his mother whose health, partly, he feared, owing to this unpleasantness, was causing him anxiety.

" I'm really very sorry to hear it. I can assure you I had a real regard for your mother—in fact, I admire her very much. But I don't see what I can do."

The other hummed and hawed.

" Mr Kurt, my mother looked upon Virginia almost like a daughter. It isn't as though you were—hum—so infatuated —I mean, you know, Virginia isn't the sort of girl—you know what I mean—she's a sort of kid—plays with my children—that sort of thing—— "

Richard avoided the point.

" But I've never attempted to interfere with her seeing Mrs Rafferty. As a matter of fact, some days ago she said she was going back there, and when her sister—— "

Richard stopped. He was just going to repeat what Brigita had said about Virginia being a fool if she went back.

" You were saying that she was going back. What happened to prevent her? "

Rafferty leant forward, waiting for the answer.

Richard thought a moment. What did happen to prevent her? He had never considered that till this moment. He looked Rafferty in the face.

" I don't know why you ask me. How can I know what is in the girl's mind? I told her sister I couldn't judge, she must know herself what she wanted to do."

The other got up.

" Anyway, I've done what I could. I leave it to you, but I must say—unless—um—unless you're in love with the girl —I can't see why—um—— " He stopped, and looked rather helplessly at Richard, who stood up and faced him.

" Supposing I were in love with her, would you expect me to say so? We're strangers to each other. We don't know each other's lives. Supposing I asked you why your late wife divorced you! What would you say to me? "

This was a facer, and Rafferty knew it was.

" I'm real sorry about all this—real sorry." He held out his hand. Richard took it without speaking, which ended the abortive interview.

Elinor came out as the visitor departed, evidently surprised and uncertain whether to be pleased or sorry that nothing dramatic had happened. It would have pleased her for Richard to have had a verbal, if not a physical, trouncing, but it would not have suited her for the breach between her husband and Mrs Rafferty to be widened or made permanent.

Richard, as always when he felt he had the best of a situation, was conciliatory.

" I think he saw the whole business is a storm in a teacup."

" All your affairs are."

" This isn't an affair. Surely I'm entitled to some sort of companionship. I've never denied it to you. I know it's awfully dull for you here now. Why don't you go to Paris? November is quite a good month there, and you've done all you can do here."

" So as to leave you free, I suppose."

Richard's face showed irritation. He muttered something about cutting off her nose to spite her face.

" Anything for a quiet life," she sighed. Then with more alacrity : " I suppose you will at least make the arrangements as you aren't coming."

" Of course, of course," Richard answered.

The icy hand of Winter held the lake in its grasp. Biting winds from across the Bergamasque Alps met the low-flying snow-clouds on their way through the St. Gothard, and whirled them hither and thither till they fell to earth, shrouding with white the steep descents and hamlets clustering round the shore.

Richard was more alone than he had ever been in his life.

After Elinor's departure he had sent away the servants, keeping only Pietro, who looked after him and cooked his meals. For two days the fall had been so heavy, and the drifts so deep, that he had been almost a prisoner in the house. It was even a matter of some difficulty for Domenico to bring his letters and food from the lodge, for the slope was steep, and at the curves in the drive the snow lay twenty feet deep, blown there as it fell by the savage wind.

Alone as he was, he was not unhappy, and he was almost getting accustomed to solitude. His visits to Casana had ceased two weeks after Elinor's departure, for Count Peraldi's illness had taken a critical turn. He lay at death's door for many days, till late one night the failing flame flickered out. Up till then Virginia had called Richard up daily to give him news, but since the funeral he had heard nothing. That was four weeks ago. He had heard vaguely through Pietro that the funeral had taken place in Milan and been an important function. Domenico, who was greatly interested in all matters concerning money, hinted confidentially that *il signor Conte* had left his affairs much involved. Beyond this, the break between himself and the Peraldi family had been complete.

For the first time in his married life Richard read much. He was fully aware of his ignorance. As he read more his appetite increased. He was himself surprised at the equanimity with which he accepted an existence which was the antithesis of everything he had experienced, and at the tranquillity his new habits of reading procured him. He found himself a new world and he was beginning to explore it with a curiosity equally new. He was no longer concerned, as he

had been when he met Mary Mackintyre, with the immense difficulty of educating himself, because the process itself was so pleasant that he did not think about it at all.

During this time he often tried to think of some friend whom he knew well enough to invite to face the winter rigours with himself and a well-stocked library as sole resource. But he could think of absolutely nobody whose society would be congenial in his new frame of mind. Sometimes he thought of Virginia, wondering what was happening to her. She had always told him that her father was very dear to her, and he had known the reality of death too well himself to underestimate her inevitable grief. But it would be too much to say that his heart went out to her. Her father had been ill a long time and was an old man, and Richard felt certain that, in her case, the consolation of religion would lighten the burden. He was reminded how easily he had reconciled himself to the loss of her companionship when he received a letter from Elinor, in which one sentence ran : " I hope you appreciate your freedom to enjoy your play-girl's society." He ignored the sarcastic reference in his reply. Doubtless she interpreted his indulgence, and the generous allowance regularly remitted, as the price of his liberty.

One morning he received an unexpected letter from Cyril Franchard, from whom he had not heard since he left England a year or more before.

Cyril's sister was married to an Englishman who lived in Florence, and he was coming out to see her. Could Richard put him up for a few days *en route ?*

Richard was quite pleased. Cyril was an old friend for whom he had a real affection. He was not one of the sporting division, and lived a rather hard-up, somewhat cultured, life of his own. Fond of books, without being a student, especially devoted to collecting bric-à-brac, in which he was something of a connoisseur, he lived much at his friends' houses, where he was universally liked and made welcome. He was good-looking in a swarthy way, and a favourite with women, who must sometimes have been rather disappointed with him, because his estimate of women was so idealistic that he set them on pedestals and left them there. But he was gentle,

tactful and discreet, and these qualities, in themselves endearing, no doubt reconciled them to his romantic but Platonic devotion.

Cyril Franchard arrived. The snow had disappeared and given place to brilliant sunshine and hard frost, that glorious birthright of an Alpine climate. Richard met him at Como with the launch, which had not been out since Elinor's departure.

Cyril was entranced with everything. Unluxurious by habit, he was delighted to share the plain fare and the rather Spartan habits acquired by Richard during his solitude. It was exactly the life he loved, he told his host, and he so quickly proved the truth of this assurance that Richard rejoiced at having him, and the two friends passed delightful days. Cyril was annotating an old book on eighteenth-century engravings, and worked at this while Richard read. They made the most of the sunshine, exploring Como, where they made an exhaustive study of the cathedral and other old churches, and where Cyril picked up some bargains.

One afternoon while his friend was ransacking a little antiquity shop in one of the back streets, Richard sat talking in the doorway to the proprietor. He knew him well, as he did all such dealers, from whom he and Elinor had made many purchases. He liked gossiping with them, and they spoke freely to him. The man began talking about Mrs Rafferty and the Peraldi family. Had *il signor* seen Mrs Rafferty lately? No? She was going to Paris, he believed, after the Peraldi funeral. The family had come back to Casana a day or two ago from Milan; he had seen Donna Brigita but not Donna Virginia. She was very unhappy, he had heard, and had not been seen by anyone since her father's death. Presently Cyril came out, and they walked back to Aquafonti. Cyril, never talkative, noticed that Richard was rather silent, and with characteristic tact did not attempt conversation. Richard was thinking of Virginia. Had he been unkind? She had asked him to the funeral in the name of the family, and he had written to the Contessa excusing himself. He had also written to Virginia expressing sympathy, but he knew the letter had been formal and perfunctory, and

he had made no sign since. Ought he to have done something?

As soon as they reached Aquafonti he rang up Casana. After some delay Brigita came to the telephone. He inquired after her mother and Virginia. Both were well, Brigita said. Would it please them if he visited them? He would be glad to if he were not intruding. She would be delighted; it would cheer them up; certainly he was to bring his friend. Her mother would perhaps not be able to receive them, but she herself would be delighted. He rang off, feeling relieved. Evidently she was just the same as before.

The next afternoon they went over to Casana and were received by Brigita in deepest black.

Cyril treated her with the deferential sympathy one accords to the utterly disconsolate, and the look of respectful devotion that Richard expected came into his eyes. Soon she was chatting away quite happily, and Cyril glanced at Richard as though he would say: "Isn't it wonderful how this lovely, desolate creature bears up under her sorrow?" Virginia did not appear, and after a discreet interval Richard asked where she was.

"Virginia's in the convent, poor girl."

Cyril's calf-like eyes expressed unutterable things, but Richard thought he caught a shade of mockery in her voice, and pursued the subject in spite of his friend's look of shocked surprise.

"Indeed, about the worst thing she could do, I should say. I don't believe in that morbid sort of——"

Cyril looked positively pained and interrupted him.

"You're not a Catholic, Richard. You don't understand how they feel about such things."

Brigita's face could be expressive at times, and she had a sense of humour. Her eyes met Richard's, and he feared she was going to laugh outright. Fortunately Cyril's tactful change of subject saved the situation. He began talking about Aquafonti and bric-à-brac, regretting that his stay was so short that he wouldn't be able to find much before he left.

"I know where there are lots of antiques," Brigita remarked.

His interest was immediately aroused.

" A friend of ours, Marchesa Sismondo, who lives some miles the other side of Como, has a house full of them. It's a wonderful old place. Virginia's her particular friend; she'd take you over if she were here. The old lady is rather offended with me because—— " She hesitated, adding with a comical expression, " For a particular reason."

" That would have been delightful. What a pity your sister isn't here ! "

The bargain-hunter in Cyril was aroused.

" You never can tell with Virginia. She may get tired of the nuns and turn up at any moment."

Cyril's romantic sympathy would have had another shock if the lure of the antique had not absorbed him to the exclusion of sentiment. But he was too well-bred to pursue the subject, and shortly afterwards they took their leave, promising to meet the next day.

V

Since Richard had been alone at Aquafonti he had lived entirely in the library, even taking his meals there, for he preferred the room to any in the house. Cyril shared the preference, and their cosy evenings were entirely to his taste. Arranging rooms was an art he thoroughly understood, and he had, with Richard's encouragement, moved the furniture about so as to increase their comfort and enable them to sit in front of the great fireplace with their books at hand and lamps conveniently placed for reading.

On their way back from Casana (they had gone by road because Cyril insisted upon exercise) snow had begun falling again, and by the time they reached Aquafonti it was several inches deep. There had been a hard frost, and it lay crisp and unmelting where it fell.

After dinner they were glad to draw their arm-chairs nearer to the blazing logs. They fell to talking about the Peraldis.

" What a charming girl Donna Brigita is, and so brave ! One can see she's full of heart." The liberal flow of Chianti during dinner had not lessened Cyril's romantic sentiments.

" Quite a good sort. But Virginia's my special friend."

He began giving his friend an account of her. Cyril was a good listener. Perhaps this and the comfort of the cosy room and its warm colour in contrast with the storm outside were the immediate causes of that unaccountable emotion which took possession of Richard again. As he proceeded his voice grew tender involuntarily. He was telling his friend about Virginia's coming over to announce Mrs Rafferty's visit.

" I can't describe her to you. I had been expecting her for two whole days. You know how it is when one's rather down and—— "

He paused in his narrative, which Cyril had been following closely, pulling at his pipe and gazing into the fire with an expression of pensive interest. He knew much, if not all, that Richard's life was and had been and was one of the very few who was proof against Elinor's allurements. He was always courteous, but he did not like her. This was not only, if at all, because of her actual conduct as the wife of Richard ; it was far more because of her spiteful tongue. Cyril Franchard was too loyal to bear easily with those who abused his friends. And this Elinor made a point of doing, because she envied others that which she could never secure.

" I was on the balcony there," Richard continued. " I wish you could have seen her before you left. She's quite unlike anyone else."

He went on to describe Mrs Rafferty's visit. Cyril knew Mrs Rafferty by name and reputation.

" You must have tried the old lady pretty high, old chap."

" Not at all. How ? "

" What other object could she have had but to protect the girl ? From your own showing, she's a child in her innocence. I must say I don't think you've behaved well."

" You can't judge, Cyril." Richard was not in the least annoyed with his friend. The view Cyril expressed was characteristic of him, and quite in keeping with his attitude towards women.

" It's not a case of judgment." Cyril got up heavily and knocked the ashes out of his pipe. " You're a married man,

and any girl you go about with like that has to bear the brunt of it. It's rotten, of course, because I know you're not the sort of man to take advantage of a young girl, but it just can't be done—that's all."

Richard did not reply. His thoughts were not concerned with Cyril. He liked him, esteemed him, in a way, for his opinions, though he generally thought them ridiculous. His thoughts were of Virginia in her convent. He longed to see her again ; he was hungry for her guttural voice, for her gurgle, her barking laugh, the firm clasp of her hand. He walked over to the window and threw it open. The cold air rushed into the warm room, deliciously refreshing. His head felt hot ; he had a sensation of tightness round the temples. He went out on the balcony from which he had watched her white figure disappear towards Casana. The snow was falling steadily. He stood there, peering into the whiteness till his head and shoulders were covered with tiny frosty feathers. What wouldn't he give to see her now ?

What was that ? Again !—a whistle out there—on the lake in such a night !

" Cyril, come out here," he called breathlessly. " Isn't that a whistle ? Listen ! "

Again—this time unmistakable. He shouted back at the top of his voice : " Hulloa ! Hulloa ! Hulloa ! "

" Hulloa ! " came back the answer.

He dashed out of the house, switching the light over the water-steps as Virginia, white with snow from head to foot, swiftly ran to the stern of her boat, so that its nose lightly glided up to where he stood.

As Richard seized it, Cyril stood on the bridge above and looked over, quite bewildered.

" I came about Marchesa Sismondo's antiques," the girl called up to him, and Richard helped her out.

Virginia shook off the snow, which clung to her like dust in the frosty air, and mounted the steps, followed by Richard. On the bridge she shook hands with Cyril without waiting for an introduction.

" Brigita said you might be going at any time, and I wanted

to catch you." Turning her back on him, she bent towards Richard. " Skin me."

He pulled off the thick sweater, like those worn by yachting crews, with the name of their ship emblazoned on the chest ; a sailor's cap was pulled down over her ears.

They entered the library together and she took a cigarette from a box, standing in front of the fire like a man. Cyril struck a match. His face had a look of deep concern.

" I can't tell you how good I think it is of you, but I wish you hadn't taken such a risk. It's an awful night."

" Awful ? " she laughed. " It's glorious. I could see the moon rising through the snow. It will be a perfect day to-morrow."

Richard went to the balcony ; the window was still open.

" By Jove ! you're right. Look, Cyril."

The moon had risen above the mountains behind Aquafonti and shone through the fine, powdery snow like a mild April sun through a shower.

Cyril looked disappointed. This was taking the edge off romance. He was enjoying and deploring her supposed foolhardiness.

" That's all very well now, but it was awful an hour ago. Really, Miss Virginia, you know, you oughtn't—— "

" You don't know our lake. It's nothing. They catch the best trout in this sort of weather."

As she stood in front of the fire smoking she never looked at Richard. All her attention was bestowed on Cyril, who offered her a drink from the tray conveniently disposed between their two armchairs. She would have a glass of water, she said. She gulped it down, handing back the glass.

" It's more comfortable here. You've changed it." She was speaking to Richard for the first time.

" Fancy your noticing ! That's Cyril's touch."

Richard dropped into a chair and poured out a glassful of whisky. Cyril was standing.

" Won't you sit down, Miss Virginia ? "

Her wide mouth opened in a smile.

" Isn't he funny ? Tell him to call me Virginia, and not to be so polite."

" Call her Virginia, old chap, and sit down and have a drink."

Cyril did so, looking uncomfortable.

" When shall we go to Sismondo? To-morrow? " she asked.

" I'd love to," Cyril answered.

" All right. I'll bring the mule from the farm and a sledge."

" Not if I know it," Richard interrupted. " I'll hire a car. We'll call for you and Brigita."

" He's so grand, isn't he? " to Cyril. " Brigita won't come. Marchesa Sismondo's angry with her because she won't marry her nephew."

Cyril scented more romance.

" What's the nephew like? "

" I don't know. He's—— "

Something happened to Virginia's cap. As she pulled it straight, Richard, whose eyes had never left her since she entered the room, noticed that it was wringing wet and the melted snow was trickling down her neck. She was wearing an open-necked jersey.

He got up and took hold of the cap, intending to pull it off her head, but she held it on with both hands. In the struggle part of her head was exposed at the nape of the neck. Richard suddenly dropped his hands.

" Virginia! Good Lord! "

" Well. Now you know."

She pulled off her cap. Her beautiful hair was cut short like a boy's.

" What on earth did you do it for? "

Richard's voice showed plainly that he was horrified.

She stood silent. Cyril looked at Richard.

" Don't ask her."

" I must go now. Telephone what time you'll come to-morrow. Good-bye, Cyril." She held out her hand to him.

" But what's it like outside? " Cyril asked, as he took her hand.

She pointed to the window, left uncurtained when Richard shut it.

The moon was shining brightly ; there was only a ripple on the water.

The three went to the bridge together. Again Virginia held out her hand.

" Good-night, Cyril."

" Good-night, Virginia."

He turned with a reluctant expression and went back into the house.

" Look out, going down the steps." Richard, who was a little in front of her, nearly slipped as he spoke. The boat was covered with a thin layer of ice, the rope by which it was moored to the steps was frozen. " You can't go back in that boat."

She looked at it doubtfully.

" The rowlocks will be rather stiff." Then, as an afterthought : " Lend me your dinghy."

One side of the villa being built on piles, the water flowed freely under it, making an ideal boat-house, which could be entered from inside the house or from the little inlet by the water-steps overlooked from the bridge. Richard intended getting the boat out from within, since this seemed easiest, but as he reached the bridge he saw that Virginia had got into her boat and was already entering the archway of the boat-house. He went down again. She had switched on the electric light and with the skill of a born waterman had berthed her own dinghy and returned with his.

" No use going in to fetch it. Good-night, Richard."

He looked into her eyes an instant, questioning, then, pushing off with his feet, jumped in. Neither spoke a word until they were a hundred yards from the house.

" You'll be cold," she remarked in a matter-of-fact tone.

" Not if we both row. I'll take the bow oars."

Another advantage of Virginia's rowlock arrangement was that one could sit in the bows and scull facing the other who rowed standing up. Thus they could talk to each other comfortably.

" Won't Cyril be frightened ? "

Her use of the word amused Richard. Cyril might possibly be shocked when he found out Richard had gone with her.

" Never mind about that. Why did you cut your hair ? "

" What does it matter? It's less trrobble."

" That's not the reason. What is? "

They were rowing slowly and easily. Richard was in no hurry and set the pace. The moon was shining down on them so brightly that he could see her face almost as clearly as by day. For a moment she didn't answer, and he stopped rowing and watched her as her body moved with the strokes of her oars.

" Why do you ask? " she equivocated.

" Because I want to know. Because there's some reason you're hiding from me."

She had been avoiding his gaze ; now she looked straight at him with an earnest expression.

" I was in the convent and it was so peaceful. My father was all I had, and—— "

Richard's heart gave a leap.

" You thought of—you mean to say you'd do that without saying a word to me? "

" You don't care." She did not say the words sadly, she uttered a half-laugh.

" I do care—but that's nothing to do with it. It's a crime to do such a thing. You, a young girl with your life before you. It's a crime," he repeated.

" I didn't do it, did I? "

" No ; but you were near doing it. You've shaved your hair."

" Not quite." She held both sculls in one hand and ran the other through the thick, short hair. He noticed it was left fairly long in front and fell naturally on either side of her forehead like a boy's.

" You always said you wished I was a boy."

" I don't mind about the hair. It will grow. It's the other thing."

They both began rowing again ; they were close to Casana.

" How did you get out? Your mother did not know, surely? "

" Naw. I slid down the water-pipe."

They ran alongside the broad pier-wall built high out of the water. In former days the old Count had been a keen yachts-

man, and his harbour was the largest on the lake. She grasped a rope fastened to a ring and stood a moment holding it. The time had come to say good-bye, but Richard lingered. He did not know what to say. It would be either less than he felt or more than he ought to express. He only knew that he did not want to part from her, that he was suffering at the thought of it. But he either could not, or dared not, say so.

"Good-night, Richard."

He held her hand an instant, then pressed it to his lips almost fiercely, holding it to them until she pulled it away, and with a cat-like agility half ran, half clambered on to the top of the wall.

Cyril's face expressed grave displeasure when Richard got back.

To Richard's "Sorry, old man, to have left you like this," he replied with some sourness: "You took care not to take me." Richard's lame excuse that he did not like to drag him out led to further words. Finally, but with a certain reluctance, Cyril blurted out: "You know you're in love with her. What's the use of pretending you aren't?"

Richard's reply must have surprised him.

"I wonder if I am."

Cyril, being always more or less in love in his own way, returned: "As if you didn't know."

"You may not believe it, but I don't. Sometimes I think I am, at others I know I'm not. She's a ripping companion—ripping—yet she's utterly without mind—but that's not the reason."

Cyril listened and said nothing. He must have known that Richard was telling the truth, for he was overfrank by nature. He was enjoying the talk about it. Cyril would not have owned it to himself, but the very fact that Richard was sailing rather close to the wind with Virginia appealed to his romantic ideas. Anything might happen, a tragedy—who could tell?

"You're playing with fire." The remark was a figurative smacking of the lips.

Richard had poured out a drink and was looking into the fire.

"I believe I am."

"Chuck it. Come with me to Florence."

Richard knew his friend did not expect him to do what he suggested, knew also that Cyril was enjoying the rôle of the austere friend. He would have dearly loved to have the cruel task imposed upon him of breaking the news to Virginia that this married man, whose heart was broken, had summoned all his courage and will-power, for her sake had renounced his love for her, and had gone out of her life for ever.

He was pretty certain that if Brigita got a chance she would whisper a word or two in dear old Cyril's ear that would give him something quite new to think about in connection with women.

"Florence sounds inviting. I'll think about it. But, if I clear out, Virginia may take it into her head to go into that convent."

He recounted what Virginia had said.

"Who knows?" Cyril remarked solemnly when Richard had finished. "There are women for whom that is the only vocation. After all, there's something in religion"—his voice grew softer, he took a deep draught of whisky and soda—"in contemplating the divine——"

Richard jumped up and stretched himself.

"Come on to bed, Cyril. We've got to be at Casana at ten. There are some bargains to be got at Sismondo, and I want you to have some."

Cyril waited at the top of the stairs while Richard switched off the lights.

"D'you believe there really is a Cellini bronze there? Donna Brigita assured me——"

"I don't know. We'll see to-morrow."

Cyril accompanied Richard to his room door.

"It would be worth a fortune, you know."

"I know," repeated Richard, yawning. "Good-night, old man."

Amongst Richard's letters the following morning was one from his father. Their correspondence had never been frequent, but Richard had made a point of keeping in touch with Mr Kurt since the latter's health had begun to fail. He knew that the old man's life was lonely, and he felt sorry for him. The letter was a short one, a mere note :

" My dear Richard,—The enclosed has been sent to me evidently by mistake. Note the address."

Richard turned over the enclosed envelope. It was addressed to —— Kurt, Esq., at his father's London house.

" I don't think there is anything for me to say except that I hope you will consider carefully what action you intend taking, and that, so far as my poor health permits, I shall be ready to advise and help you if you call upon me. Yours affectionately,

W.K."

He took out the other letter, turning it over to look at the signature : " A. P. Thorne." He could not recall the name and began reading. It was headed " Belvedere, Galatz," and ran as follows :—

" Dear Sir,—I regret to be compelled for self-protection to write you regarding the conduct of your wife when she was staying at my hotel at Drina. I have been informed from various sources that this lady is spreading injurious reports regarding the management and the guests. Indeed several of the latter who come habitually in the autumn did not do so this season in consequence.

I cannot afford to be ruined by the spiteful tongue of a woman whose behaviour was so disgraceful that my manager requested her to leave the hotel. If you require further information you will no doubt be able to obtain it for yourself, but I may add that the gentleman whose compromising actions led to the drastic proceedings alluded to was named Brendon. Yours faithfully,

A. P. Thorne."

The immediate result of reading the letter was a rage so intense that he was on the point of entering Cyril's room and telling him that he was going to Galatz that day to chastise the blackguard who had traduced his wife. On second thoughts he decided to do nothing impulsive. He must think. So this was what had happened! He had always felt that there had been a disagreeable incident which Elinor had hidden from him. Poor girl, poor girl! What a fool she was! Why would she not realise that he was her best friend? If only she had told him at the time he would have very soon dealt with that scoundrel of a manager. Of course Elinor had been foolish. No doubt that vicious young scamp had compromised her. She always trusted any plausible beast of a man rather than himself. He had warned her against Reggie at the start. How right he had been! Naturally his father believed the story, so would his sisters. Would his father tell them? He hardly thought so. If he didn't, who else was there to know? It depended upon the line he took. As to that, Richard was not in doubt a second. He had a large writing-desk in his bedroom. Seizing a sheet, he wrote:

"Sir,—Your infamous letter has reached me. Of course I do not credit a word of it, and if it ever reaches my ears that you have repeated your manager's lies to anyone else I shall give you a thrashing first and bring an action for criminal libel against you afterwards. You are now warned. Yours, etc.

Richard Kurt."

This relieved him. His next step was to tear the letter into tiny little pieces, place them in his coffee saucer and set fire to them. Then he sat down and wrote to his father:

"My dear Father,—I have received your letter with enclosure. I need hardly tell you that I do not believe a word of what that blackguard said, though I daresay Elinor has been foolish and laid herself open to very unpleasant consequences. Fortunately I am here to protect her. Of course you will never tell the girls. I shall bitterly resent any allusion to this incident hereafter. Your affectionate son,

R."

After all, Brigita went to Sismondo. She said it was too good to miss seeing Cyril flirt with the Marchesa. She was an enormously fat woman of fifty, who had been good-looking in her youth, and was all smiles and amiability, but as deaf as a post. She greeted both girls affectionately, and gave the whole party a warm welcome. The house was one of those tumble-down affairs often met with in Italy. Palladian in style and not without grandeur, it was rapidly falling into ruins. The interior was entirely barren of modern conveniences, but the proportions of the rooms were noble and greatly impressed Cyril. He wandered through them with widely staring eyes, examining with undisguised interest the furniture and the masses of bibelots with which they were crammed. The rotund Marchesa followed, explaining volubly in screaming Italian, of which Cyril did not understand a word. Brigita acted as interpreter and took special pleasure in mistranslating, putting in names of her own invention, instead of those mentioned by the Marchesa, as the painters or sculptors or craftsmen responsible for the objects Cyril was regarding. Every now and then Brigita said something so absurd that Cyril looked up and asked her to repeat what she had said. A triangular colloquy ensued, leading to much mutual misunderstanding and confusion. Meanwhile Richard and Virginia wandered off together into the garden, which, like the house, had once been a fine example of the Italian Renaissance, with its statues, terraces and fountains. These were now either broken beyond repair, or so fragmentary as to require a high degree of artistry to restore them, but the general effect was beautiful in the extreme. There was a hard frost, and trees and plants were a mass of sparkling diamonds.

There was one old servant to serve lunch. He was also gardener and coachman, and had little practice as butler; moreover, he kept up a running conversation with his mistress and the two girls during the meal, so that accidents were numerous. But everybody thoroughly enjoyed it, and Cyril drank freely from a great flagon of red wine, which the Marchesa assured him had been in her cellars since immediately after the Austrian occupation, though Brigita said it came from the village

osteria. Both girls were full of mischief, and made chaffing remarks about the Marchesa's person to each other in Italian, to the others in English, much to Cyril's discomfort. The more pained he looked the more Brigita persisted, and it ended, as Cyril helped himself freely to wine, by his enjoying their fooling as much as the Marchesa herself, who, quite unconscious of being a butt, entered into the spirit of the thing with hearty good will.

After lunch she excused herself. She was going to have a siesta. They could go where they pleased, and make themselves at home. Later Signor Franchard and she would talk business.

" Have you seen a *roccolo* ? "

Virginia and Richard were strolling through a plantation. They had left the two others to inspect the contents of the house. Brigita had promised to help Cyril by showing him round, and afterwards by helping him to come to terms with the Marchesa if he saw anything he wanted to buy.

The *roccolo* was a horribly ingenious invention for catching small birds, regarded at no distant period as a " sport " by Italian gentlemen. Richard, having ascertained so much, desired to know nothing more.

" Let's get away," he said.

They roamed farther into a wood of beech and walnut trees. Their bareness of leaf was relieved by camellias, laurels and other evergreens. In a semicircle formed by some of these, with great walnuts towering above them, they found a sheltered spot and sat down on the fallen leaves, dried on the surface by the sun, which shone as brightly as in an English June.

Virginia disposed herself against a tree-trunk and, lighting a cigarette, smoked lazily and silently. As they walked he had been thinking again of the letter he had received. His was an unsecretive nature at any time, and under the influence of the girl's easy companionship his mood became expansive. He wanted badly to confide in someone. He had contemplated telling the whole story to Cyril. He knew he would be sympathetic. He would be certain to tell him he was sure

there was nothing in it and the right thing was to ignore it. And it was more than likely, though Cyril did not like Elinor (and Richard knew this was the case in spite of his never having even hinted at it), he would disbelieve the story. Cyril's conviction that all women were but a little lower than the angels in purity, whatever their tempers or other defects, was so strong that he would not allow himself to believe anything against the repute of one he esteemed even though the proof were before his eyes. In Elinor's case he would require more conclusive evidence than that of a hotel-manager. And, strangely, this was not at all what Richard wanted. He did not know perhaps what he was seeking.

He looked at Virginia, wondering if, perhaps, this girl who seemed so innocent and childish had not as much capacity for judging such a situation as anyone he could ask. She was a woman, and in matters of sex women were sometimes more intuitive than men.

Without further reflection he asked her: "What do you think of Reggie Brendon?"

Virginia's eyes were half closed. She opened them widely and stared at him.

"Why do you ask?"

"Answer my question and I'll tell you."

"I think he's no good, but Mrs Rafferty likes him."

"What does Mrs Rafferty say about him?" Richard gazed at her curiously as she considered.

"She says he's—he's—fascinating but dangerous."

She pronounced the words slowly, evidently quoting. Richard gave a short laugh.

"Why dangerous?"

"I shan't answer any more questions till you tell me."

"Well. I've had a letter."

Virginia made a movement that was almost a start.

"From whom?"

"From a man called Thorne."

She threw away her cigarette.

"Then you know."

"Do you mean to say"—Richard spoke excitedly—"do you mean that you know?"

" I knaw."

" That that young villain compromised—— "

" He had to leave Drina at the same time as Mrs Kurt."

" Good God ! Who told you ? "

" Mrs Rafferty. The Prince told her, and when she told me —I left Scapa."

" You left Scapa ? " Richard was bewildered.

" Yes. Because she said you didn't mind, that you knew and went away on purpose. And when I've got a—when people talk like that—— "

" You're a friend, Virginia. I understand. Look here, does Mrs Rafferty, do they all, believe this damned lie ? "

A very slight, elusive smile flickered an instant in her eyes.

" I don't understand these things, but Mrs Rafferty said the Prince told her—— "

She hesitated.

" What did he tell her ? "

" Reggie said so."

CHAPTER XI

i

Since Cyril's departure Richard's reading, becoming more and more desultory, had finally ceased, while his visits to Casana were now so frequent that he almost lived there. His life had drifted into a day-to-day affair; he did not heed time.

The situation in which old Count Peraldi had left his family necessitated drastic reduction of their expenditure. They were extreme in their methods, he knew, but he was hardly prepared for their suddenly leaving the Casana house and establishing themselves at the stables. These were large and commodious, but it came as something of a shock to Richard when, on going over one morning unexpectedly, he found the family moving. They soon adjusted themselves to the new situation. The Contessa dismissed all the servants, and insisted that she and her daughters must do the work of the house themselves. To this Virginia was entirely agreeable. She had always done her own room, she told Richard, as she hated servants touching her things. But Brigita demurred, so that the "scenes" between her mother and herself were many, and Richard made a point of keeping out of the way for a time, though he made use of the garden rendezvous. Marchesa Sismondo's nephew now appeared on the scene. He was little more than a youth, but had the dissipated appearance of one who lives a night-life. As a rule he lived in Milan, where he had a flat in the same street as the Palazzo Peraldi.

To pacify her mother, and provide a good excuse for not doing domestic work, Brigita undertook the family business. What this meant Richard did not know, but it involved frequent visits to Milan for the day. He understood that

there was a guardian, and that the detail was managed by an employee of the late Count called Rizzo, who apparently had been in the family for years. Undisturbed by the reduction of their income, and indifferent to the responsibilities she had undertaken, Brigita's chief employment seemed to consist in confusing, mystifying and bamboozling this poor old Rizzo, in which proceedings she was, it appeared, assisted by Cesare Sismondo. At any rate, the two generally went to Milan, or came back, together, and Richard was frequently entertained with accounts of "business" arrangements which, though certainly comic, did not increase his confidence in Brigita's management of the family affairs.

Brigita seemed to have the youthful Cesare entirely under her thumb, which might, Richard thought, be quite as good for him as his habitual influences. He was evidently a weak-willed youth, in appearance unpleasant almost to the point of repulsiveness, with his spotty skin and unhealthy, soft body. He hated every form of exercise, smoked endlessly and had an abnormal appetite.

Since the family moved to the *scuderia* Virginia had undertaken the cleaning of the stables, which were below, the family apartments being over them. They kept only one old horse, but the place was full of an unimaginable assortment of harness and horse-clothing, while there were carriages and vehicles of many kinds, ancient and modern. All these were to be sold, but each time discussion as to which carriage and which harness were to be kept and which disposed of led to altercation, with the result that Virginia's labours remained almost overwhelming. She was very conscientious in such matters, and to keep the whole concern neat and tidy involved many hours of work a day.

Richard tried remonstrance, but the girl was obstinate.

"Naw, I said I would do it," was her invariable reply.

It ended by his tackling the job with her, and it became a regular thing for him to turn up at a certain hour in the morning and get to work with water, brushes, paste and leathers.

This form of activity made a direct appeal to the Contessa, who was one of those people who never want to sell anything

for fear they may not get full value, and go on keeping things till they are useless. Consequently Richard's presence at all hours of the day was taken as a matter of course, and he grew into the family so completely that neither Virginia's mother nor anyone else any longer questioned his assumption of a brotherly intimacy.

As the weather grew warmer he got into the habit of bringing over a change of clothes, and, when the Augean labours were over, Virginia and he would don bathing suits under vague over-garments and row off in the *batello* covered with an awning, with wooden steps hung on to the side, for a dip.

Gradually, too, the family got accustomed to his taking any odd meal with them and then disappearing. They did not know whether Virginia accompanied him or not, nor did they inquire. He perfectly realised that, once Elinor returned, it could not be kept going in the same way. Once she was back at Aquafonti and the house was full of servants, it would be a palpable pretence that it was part of his obligation as a friend to wash carriages and clean harness. And this reflection was causing him a good deal of concern. Contessa Peraldi had an awkward way of turning round and altering her point of view, and, while he was determined that he would not give up Virginia's companionship as long as she courted his, he had misgivings as to the eventual penalty. On the whole, he inclined towards a solution that implied the squaring of Elinor. After all, his friendship with the girl was innocent enough in all conscience, and his wife certainly owed him as much liberty as he accorded her.

The situation came to a head with some abruptness.

One morning in the midst of his labours Pietro brought him a telegram from his wife.

" Returning Aquafonti tenth bringing two guests and butler engage other servants writing."

This telegram brought about a swift reversal of parts. In domestic emergencies Richard was somewhat helpless, but Virginia stepped into the breach with promptness and vigour. She rushed off right and left on her bicycle and gathered

together a household with a speed that seemed to him miraculous. Aquafonti became a scene of bustling activity that Richard intensely disliked but accepted as inevitable, congratulating himself on the possession of such a competent lieutenant.

Elinor's letter mentioned her guests by name. These were Jason Baddingley and Cholmondeley Robinson, with both of whom Richard had a passing acquaintance. He remembered Baddingley as a gentle person with musical tastes who was equerry to a minor royalty. Cholmondeley was an inferior painter of portraits. Apparently this constituted his claim on Elinor's hospitality, as she informed her husband that she had been sitting to him, and that the artist was frightfully keen on getting the right atmosphere. Apparently Elinor was to be painted in a bower of roses which only bloomed suitably in the Aquafonti garden.

With the realisation that his days of temporary liberty were numbered there came to Richard a sense of weariness he vainly tried to throw off. Whatever the disadvantages of the desultory existence he had been leading, it had at all events been peaceful. What he dreaded most was the rekindling in himself of the slowly burning fire of resentment, of rebellion against fate. If he could have continued indefinitely living as though he possessed no powers of reflection, he thought he could gradually have evolved a philosophy which would at least have made life bearable. But he knew that Elinor's coming would end all that. Still it was something that those two men were accompanying her. At least they would serve as buffers between them and prevent opportunity for personal disagreement and arguments.

In due course they arrived. Richard sent a carriage to the station and awaited them at Como harbour in the motor-launch. The new butler, a black-browed person, sat on the box.

After the first shaking of hands Cholmondeley Robinson stood aside from the embarking group, drinking in the beauty of the scene.

He was a small, middle-aged man with sparse grey hair, jaunty manners and a Cockney accent. He was fond of

gesturing with his upraised right thumb, and his favourite adjective was " supernal," which he applied indiscriminately.

Baddingley was a colourless creature of courteous address. He seemed to be feeling a little strange, as though he didn't quite know how he'd got there or what he had come for. Elinor's chief concern was the butler, whose name was Norman. She assured Richard, in faulty French, that he was in every respect admirable.

Arrival at the villa was something of a ceremony and also rather confusing as Elinor knew none of the servants, they did not know each other, and Norman could not understand a word they said. Eventually some sort of order was evolved, the guests were shown their bedrooms, and tea was served on the terrace. This demanded no small exertion on Richard's part, and by the time it was accomplished he was in an irritable mood. When Domenico turned up in the *batello*, and said that their trunks had gone astray, it was Elinor's turn. If there was one thing in the world that upset her it was to be parted from her trunks. Like many Americans, living in them had become second nature to her. It was not merely the inconvenience that affected her ; there was something symbolic in what her trunks represented. Her sentiments were outraged by the very possibility of losing them. Hers was the unreasoning and horrified grief of a mother who has lost her child in a crowd.

What was to be done ?

They had finished tea. Cholmondeley Robinson had risen and gone to the end of the garden. In the first rush of artistic emotion engendered by the beauty of the scene he could not contemplate toast and jam, let alone bread and butter. He was standing by one of the pillars with his left arm on the base of one of Elinor's stone *bambini*, while, with his right thumb held before his nose, he patterned the lake and the mountains opposite. As Elinor, aghast and dumbfounded by the tragedy, was questioning the waiting Domenico, Robinson approached the group as though he were walking in his sleep.

" Supernal ! " he muttered. " Supernal ! "

Baddingley went close up to him.

" Our trunks are lost."

Robinson jumped as though he had been kicked from the back.

" What ? I say—— "

He almost landed on Richard's feet.

" What on earth are we to do ? "

" Wait till they turn up, I suppose. I can lend you what you want for to-night."

" How like a man—your sort of man ! " Elinor turned on her husband savagely. " Wait while, for all you know, the trunks have gone to the other end of Italy. And they're all thieves on the railways in this beastly country."

" Have you got the receipts ? " Richard asked the gardener.

Domenico handed them to him while Elinor made a gesture of enraged despair.

" I'll see about it," he said, signing to the man to follow him.

Giving the gardener instructions to be at hand when required, he summoned Pietro and a few minutes later was speeding across the lake in the launch.

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Of course the trunks were all right. Equally, of course, Richard retrieved them, with Virginia's assistance, at Chiasso custom-house. But it took the rest of the day, as they had to hire a motor and go there to fetch them. The motor would not hold a quarter of them. Elinor's baggage was always stupendous in quantity.

" Elinor would eat me if I risked letting them go on to Como by rail. Now we've got 'em, we'll stick to them. The motor can go to Como and you can go back in it." His tone was intentionally half-hearted.

" What are you going to do ? " Virginia asked.

" Me ? Oh, I'm going to find a cart."

" You can't alone. Shall I help you ? "

Now, Richard had been hoping, almost praying, for such a suggestion. His action was entirely disingenuous. There

were at least three other ways in which he could have assured the safe delivery of the luggage, and he knew it. The whole arrangement was merely a dodge to be with Virginia, and he intended to take full advantage of Elinor's foolish fears in the process. He knew she would be too thankful for the restoration of her precious trunks to criticise his method of transporting them. His decision to send away the motor was a preparatory burning of boats.

" That's sweet of you, but—— "

He was saved making a lame allusion to the propriety of the proceeding by her reply.

" I knaw—we must hire a bullock-cart like when I brought things to Scapa."

The car was dismissed to Como.

Richard was well aware that bullocks were the slowest mode of transport. He also knew that Virginia could equally well have hired some horse-drawn vehicle. The reflection that she was in the conspiracy was, for the moment, balm to his soul. He did not allow himself to think. He wanted to be with her, and that was all that mattered. That she was his partner in deceit never occurred to him. What did occur to him, and thrilled him as he thought of it, was that she wanted to be with him. His heart began to throb painfully ; the choking feeling in the throat he had experienced before prevented him from answering when she said she would find the man with the bullocks. It was late already. They were closing the station until the nine o'clock train from beyond the St Gothard. He must remain with the luggage, she said. He sat down on one of Elinor's enormous trunks and lit a cigarette, watching Virginia disappear in search of the cart. The emotion would not leave him. His heart beat excitedly ; he was shaking as with ague. He made an attempt to calm himself but surrendered to his sensations. His mind refused to obey his will. He threw away his cigarette. " *Tant pis*," he said aloud. The sound of his own voice helped him to master himself, but the mastery was for the moment only. He was no longer self-deceived. He knew that while her hold on him lasted this girl owned him ; that what might happen no longer depended upon him but upon her. . . .

The long wait became unbearable. The piazza was deserted. Occasionally a heavy cart rattled over the cobbles. An old peasant woman staggered up to the station entrance under a heavy load of miscellaneous personal effects tied up in a blanket and, finding it closed, sat down on the pavement. She spat solemnly into the gutter and fixed her eyes on him, blinking under the garish electric light. The woman got on his nerves. He began pacing restlessly, looking up and down the piazza to the streets beyond, and keeping the precious baggage in sight. Gradually he extended his tedious promenade to a café at the corner, and sitting down at the small table called for a glass of *grappa*. This set his blood tingling again more than before. He threw down a coin impatiently and walked back to the station. The old woman still sat there, blinking at him. Damn her! Why didn't Virginia come? It couldn't take such an infernal time to find a cart. He began to be irritated with her. She knew he was there sitting on this cursed box all the time. Couldn't she hurry? With his irritation his fever increased. He went back to the café and had another *grappa*. As he lifted the glass to his lips he saw her figure in the distance. He swallowed the scalding stuff and it almost choked him as he rushed off coughing. She was standing by the heap of luggage evidently surprised at his disappearance.

"I was wondering——"

All his irritation vanished at the sound of her voice.

She looked hot and flushed, and had taken off her hat. Her hair had grown and it fell on either side of her face, covering her ears. She had on her usual short, buttoned skirt. It was made of a dark grey material and was covered with dust and bits of hay. He wanted to cry out, to tell her how glad he was that she had returned. He felt an almost overmastering desire to seize hold of her and squeeze her to him till it hurt her. Instead, he sat down on the trunk, speechless, and looked at her.

"Here they come."

Four enormous white bullocks with horns like buffaloes came into sight hauling a country cart, which in those parts consisted of a few boards laid upon wheel axles with wooden

joists or stays. A boy was driving them by means of shouts and much cracking of a whip considerably bigger than himself.

The next difficulty was to find someone to load the cart.

She spoke some rapid words to the boy, who immediately ran across the piazza.

" I've sent him for the *facchini*. He knows where to find them. Did you think I was a long time ? "

" Yes, I must say I did."

" I had to help Paolo harness. His father was out, and their farm is more than a mile outside—over there." She pointed to the dark outline of the mountains which the railway pierced.

" You must be awfully tired."

" I am—a leetle. I shall sleep later on—in the cart."

That choking sensation again caught Richard by the throat. He gulped it down and answered with apparent calm, pointing to the wagon.

" In that ? "

" You'll see. I'll make it comfortable."

Paolo arrived, followed slowly and with evident reluctance by two burly porters in blue overalls. They brightened up when Richard displayed a five-franc piece.

" Tell them I'll give them ten if they look sharp," he said to Virginia.

Under her direction the loading was a matter of few minutes. Richard noticed that she had the boxes so disposed as to leave a small space just about large enough for one person to lie in. In this space she had herself laid a bed of hay sacks, carefully making use of a canvas hold-all which Richard identified as containing Elinor's travelling pillows.

The boy uttered some strange sounds, there was a terrific cracking of the long, supple whip, and the bullocks were in motion. The porters stood gaping, with their caps in their hands, while Virginia, lighting a cigarette, turned to Richard :

" We'll walk uphill and ride afterwards."

It was a moonless night but very clear and star-lit. There was frostiness in the air. The ascent was long but gradual, and the road, made centuries before the railway, was a good

one. But progress was slow. They walked along together in the dust. Richard, still under the full weight of his emotion, found it difficult, if not impossible, to talk. Nor could he think. His reflective processes were in complete abeyance. He knew that his power to resist this thing that had got hold of him was gone, and he ceased making an effort. At last they reached the summit.

"It will do the poor beasts good to rest while we get in," Virginia said.

She called out something to the boy. The bullocks stopped obediently to his shouted command, and, climbing into the forepart of the wagon, he emerged with huge armfuls of hay, which he threw on the ground. The great heads bent lower under their heavy yokes as they began feeding. Meanwhile Virginia got in.

"Come on," she cried to Richard. "It's lovely."

She disappeared behind the trunks.

He clambered in beside her. She lay with her back to the side of the wagon and her head on Elinor's hold-all. There was a space just sufficiently large for him to sit down in and with a good deal of care to twist into a reclining posture by sharing her pillow arrangements.

He stood an instant, irresolute, awkward, looking down at her.

"You'll fall on the top of me when they move. Lie down."

He did as he was bid.

"There's plenty of room for your legs. Look."

With ingenuity he could just stretch them between two trunks without touching her, but the position would have been cramped and impossible for more than a few minutes; the slightest movement or jolt must perforce bring them into close contact. He leant his arm on the hold-all and with his head on his hand lay there, not saying anything. His heart was beating wildly. Her eyes were closed.

The whip cracked; they were off on their downward journey.

Obedient to the orders telephoned to Domenico by Richard when the trunks were discovered at Chiasso, Pietro awaited

them at the quay-side in the *batello* moored beneath the only lamp left alight.

Richard had been walking alone during the last stage of the journey, for Virginia still slept heavily. Nothing seemed to wake her until the jolting wagon came to a standstill. Then she emerged drowsily, rubbing her eyes. Once on her feet again, her activity revived. They must find someone to unload on to the boat. The square was deserted, but in the distance a late café was still illuminated. Paolo was dispatched to offer liberal pay, and returned with a waiter, who, sticking a napkin over his shirt front, tackled the trunks with furious energy.

Soon the work was done. Pietro stood to his oars. The bullocks were peacefully munching Virginia's late bed ; the urchin, for he was little more, was jingling the heavy *mangia* Richard had bestowed on him. Virginia was to pay his father ; it was dangerous to give so much money to a small boy, she said. He might be robbed on his way home.

Richard began thanking her.

" Really, you've been too—— " The words stuck in his throat. There was something hopelessly incongruous in the expression of gratitude for the services she had rendered.

" There's nothing to thank for."

How would she go home ? Should they drop her at Casana ?

" Naw, naw. It's past one o'clock. I'll take one of these." She pointed to a cluster of rowing-boats let out on hire in the day and now at their night moorings. " They all know me, and I'll tow it back to-morrow."

She jumped into the *batello*, telling Pietro to take her alongside one of them.

She quickly got to work, freeing the one she selected.

" It's a shame to leave you to row yourself home." Richard knew that his remark was perfunctory. " You must be dreadfully tired."

" After that sleep ? " She uttered her short guttural laugh.

Why did it grate so unpleasantly ?

She paddled towards the entrance of the harbour, Pietro following slowly, for the *batello* was heavily loaded.

" Shall I row you to Aquafonti in my boat first ? " she called back to him.

" I shouldn't think of such a thing."

He went to the fore part of the boat and, taking the other pair of oars, began rowing vigorously.

" Good-night. Sleep well," he called to her.

" Good-night," came back to him across the water.

Why did he feel this strange relief as he watched her fade into the night ? Why was he glad that Pietro, not she, was rowing at the other end of that heavy, flat-bottomed boat ? Was it inevitable that repulsion should succeed attraction, that physical gratification should entail moral disgust ?

iii

Late as was the hour, Elinor and her guests had not gone to bed. Light was showing through the chinks in the library windows as Richard approached the house. On the clanging of the outside bell there was an immediate blaze of light, and Cholmondeley Robinson appeared on the bridge, where he danced with joy like a marionette, exclaiming : " Supernal ! There's my valise and my easel, and there's my folding stool." He was followed by Elinor and Baddingley. In the background the forbidding-looking butler awaited an opportunity to pass through the group, and the huge form of Domenico emerged from the shadows, descending the steps to Pietro's assistance.

To Richard, tired to the verge of exhaustion by the emotions of the preceding hours, the manifestations of delight with which he was received came as a shock. He felt as though he had suddenly awakened in unexpected surroundings, uncertain whether he liked them or not. Elinor was lavish in her praise of his enterprise, and Baddingley expressed his gratitude in subdued but feeling language.

They all went into the library, and Richard poured himself out a stiff drink from the tray.

" You must have had an awful time. Aren't you starved ? "

Elinor's question reminded him that he had eaten nothing since his luncheon. He had been completely unconscious of it and felt no hunger now. His head ached, his mind was confused. He wanted the solitude of his own room and bed.

He dropped into a chair and emptied his glass.

Robinson hopped round him, full of superfluous vitality.

"There's a delicious supper waiting for you."

"Is there? I don't want any, thanks all the same."

"Oh, go in and have some," Elinor urged. "It'll take them ages to carry up the trunks, and then they've got to unpack our things for the night."

Richard declined again. "Norman can eat it."

"Drink it, you mean. There's a bottle of fizz cooling. That was my idea."

Robinson's tone showed disappointment, and Richard, feeling that he had meant well, got up.

"If you'll help me drink it."

They all went into the dining-room, and Richard mechanically helped himself to some food while Robinson opened the bottle.

"I'm glad you didn't have the motor-boat," Elinor remarked.

That he would have got there the best part of an hour sooner was not the point, as Richard knew; his wife didn't want her dainty boat scratched or marked by the luggage.

"But how did you get all that stuff to Como?" Baddingley asked.

"By bullock-cart."

"By Jove! You don't say!" from Robinson.

"Did Virginia drive it?" from Elinor.

"No, a boy did. They took three hours to do the journey. Pretty long."

He was wondering how Elinor knew the girl had been with him, when his wife remarked:

"Madame Peraldi telephoned after dinner to ask if Virginia were here."

"What did you say?"

"I said 'No,' of course. She wanted to know if you were here, and I told her you'd gone off somewhere or other to

fetch the trunks. She asked for Pietro, and it was he who told her Virginia had gone with you."

"Did she seem annoyed?"

"I'm sure I don't know, but as you hadn't informed me, naturally it was rather awkward."

"I didn't have much chance."

"You could have sent a message. *I* don't care—only it looks rather odd."

"Well, you got your trunks, didn't you?"

Baddingley's soft voice joined in:

"And I'm awfully obliged to you. Your wife told us about Miss Peraldi. I hope I shall soon have a chance of thanking her."

"By Jove! yes," echoed Robinson.

After a restless night Richard was sleeping late the following morning. He was awakened by Elinor's maid, who asked him through the door to see madame before he went downstairs. He rang for his coffee and ordered it to be taken to her room. She was dressing herself to "sit" to Cholmondeley Robinson, and was engaged at the moment in sticking innumerable pins into a picture-hat set on the side of her head and covered with flowers. The room was littered with dresses, lingerie and hats of every description.

"Can I sit down somewhere?"

She called the maid, who gave him a chair beside her in front of the big threefold mirror. He turned the chair round so as to face her, with his back to the window. Her hair looked strange to him. It had a bronze tinge in it, and her lips looked redder than usual, her cheeks pinker.

"Don't get into the way of doing too much *maquillage*."

"That's my business. I didn't send for you to make remarks on my appearance." Her tone was cold but not angry, and she continued pinning on her hat. Richard waited. "I thought you might like to talk to me privately." She finished arranging the hat, and threw a lace fichu over her shoulders. Her bodice was open at the throat, and he saw that she had stuck a round piece of black sticking plaster above one side of her left breast.

Richard was trying to think of something suitable to say by way of opening. He could think of nothing. He knew this was because he was indifferent, but he did not mean to show it.

"I hope you had a good time." The words came at last, haltingly.

"As good as a woman can expect when her husband leaves her to look after herself."

He did not attempt to recriminate.

"I had a letter from Olivia."

"Oh, did you? She's in a rage because she says I've taken Jason away from her—as if I want him."

"You've brought him, my dear girl, haven't you?"

"He turned up just when Reggie let me down. He knows good people, and as he was so keen to come, I let him."

"As bad as that?"

"Don't you call it caddish, after we've been so nice to him, to ignore me in London? His mother never even called."

"The old man died, didn't he? She must be in deep mourning."

"As if that would prevent her asking me. They treated me as though I didn't exist."

"How was Paris?"

"Not bad till Mrs Friedberg turned up and monopolised Franz. She's frightfully rich. Of course that settled it. She stuck to him like a leech. He told me he'd give anything to get away from her."

"Ada wrote something about a man called——"

"Bernasconi. Tito's rather a little fool. He's coming here in a day or two. He's a nuisance alone, so fearfully devoted. All right when there's another man."

"You had Baltazzo."

"Ugo's *gaga*—utterly *gaga*. What have *you* been doing?"

"Helping Virginia clean harness mostly."

Elinor jumped up quite in her old manner.

"You're a fool, that's all I can say. You'll simply make that spiteful old cat, Mother Rafferty, madder than ever. Mark my words. She'll cut us next."

"I shouldn't be surprised."

Richard was thinking of what Virginia had told him about Brendon at Sismondo. Should he say something that would put Elinor on her guard? Was it his duty to warn her?

She broke in on his thoughts.

"No, I dare say not. You've got hardened to doing things that injure me by now."

Her remark decided him to say nothing. Ignoring his silence, she continued:

"Anyway, you might take your guests over to Casabianca. It will be precious dull for them here."

"My guests?"

"Well, our guests if you like."

He got up slowly and was going out of the room when she called him.

"Richard, we've got to make it up with that old beast, Mrs Rafferty. Can't you give up that girl? She's nothing to you, is she?"

"I don't know."

Elinor looked at him steadily.

"Do you mean you care for her?"

"I don't know, I tell you. It's no use asking me."

"Well, I can tell you. It's simply one of your ideas."

He did not reply.

Richard went back to his room and dressed. When he got downstairs he found Baddingley reading a book.

"Like a run across the lake?"

Baddingley would be delighted.

Richard ordered out the boat and "rang up" Casana. After some time Brigita came to the telephone. Virginia had gone off early, she didn't know where. Her mother was in an awful temper because Virginia had gone with him to Chiasso. She didn't know whether he had better come over or not. Couldn't he manage to see Virginia first somehow and arrange what she was to say?

Richard had rung up from a sudden impulse to know how Virginia was. While he was waiting he became conscious that he wanted to hear her voice, and he was intensely disappointed when her sister answered. Again his feelings had

undergone a change. The reaction of the night before had left him; he was again longing to see her, and the very difficulty of finding her increased his desire. With every minute he became more impatient. By the time Baddingley and he stepped into the boat he was living for that one purpose. He answered his guest's gentle remarks at random, and, turning the boat's head towards Como, he ordered Pietro to drive the engine as hard as it could go.

The man who hired out boats at Como told him in answer to his inquiry that Donna Virginia had returned the one she had borrowed before he got there in the morning; he had not seen her. Cursing under his breath, Richard steered up the lake again. Where could she be? He was consumed with impatience. If only he could see her for a moment and put things straight before she saw her mother. All sorts of fantastic possibilities floated across his mind. Her mother could be violent when she lost her temper; she might refuse her the house, as she had often threatened, and Virginia, not knowing where to go, might return to Scapa. Once she got into Mrs Rafferty's clutches again he would be unable to see her at all. Why hadn't he been kinder, gentler to her last night? What had come over him all at once? His memory flew back to their journey in the bullock-wagon. At the thought his heart began throbbing again. What caused the reaction against her afterwards? She had been such a splendid little friend, utterly unselfish. But stop—did he still regard her like that? Hadn't she ceased to be that last night? Hadn't she become something different? Had there been grounds for his change of feeling towards her? She was just the same, just as simple, trying to serve him, offering to row him back to Aquafonti, tired as she was. And now *she* was paying for her devotion to him. *She* was being persecuted, and he, instead of protecting her, was questioning. Why should he question? He loved her, he supposed, without knowing it. Had he ever been in love before? He had often wondered. Men sometimes got mad when they fell in love. His thoughts flew on and on; suddenly they were interrupted. Pietro was asking him something.

The boat had ceased to move and it lay off Casabianca. Both Pietro and Baddingley were looking at him inquiringly. Richard pulled himself together.

"We'll go ashore and have a look round, shall we?"

As they glided up to the landing-stage a boatman in a white sailor's dress with a crown on his arm took off his hat. Hardly noticing him, Richard let Baddingley pass along the boarded gangway and began questioning Giacomo, the Casabianca boatman. Had he seen the signorina? Yes, he had seen the signorina rowing up the lake in her dinghy, towards Scapa, he supposed. Richard, his fears confirmed, went up the steps. A few yards away, in front of the hotel, was seated a group of persons, near whom stood Baddingley. As Richard got closer he saw that one of them was Prince Hohenthal. Had it been possible he would have evaded notice; he was not in the mood to talk to anyone, particularly anyone he esteemed. But the Prince had seen him and had signalled a greeting in the Continental way.

"Lady Daubeny, my friend Mr Kurt."

Baddingley was talking to a second lady.

"Susan Wensleydale gave me such a delightful description of your villa, Mr Kurt. She said it was the loveliest thing she had ever seen."

Lady Daubeny turned to her companion.

"Gladys dear, this is Mr Kurt, who owns that villa Susan spoke about."

"I've been hearing about it from Mr Baddingley." She bowed to Richard, who remained standing, uncomfortable and longing to escape.

Suddenly Mrs Rafferty, staff in hand, her small dog on her arm, came towards them from within the hotel, accompanied by another lady. Richard perceived Munro Rafferty some paces in the rear. The Prince rose to meet them, lifting his hat. Richard got up and strolled towards the stone balustrade and, leaning on it, looked into the lake. He didn't greatly care, but he wanted to avoid meeting Mrs Rafferty. He was thinking he could edge away gradually when someone touched his arm. It was Munro Rafferty.

" My mother would like to say ' How d'you do ' to you, Mr Kurt."

Shaking hands, they walked back to the party which Mrs Rafferty and her companion had joined. Richard bowed to his enemy.

She held out her hand with its short, broad-tipped fingers.

" I'm very pleased to see you again, Mr Kurt. I've just got back to Scapa. Let me introduce you to Mademoiselle de Mirepoix, who is going to spend the summer with me, I hope."

" Ah ! The summer, I never said that." The beautiful, blonde-haired girl spoke English with a strong but agreeable French accent. She bowed graciously to Richard, shaking her finger at Mrs Rafferty, who sent her back as responsive a look as her impassive features could express. This exchange enabled Richard to recover from his surprise at Mrs Rafferty's cordiality. So far from being delicate, the situation appeared to be perfectly natural. There was no shadow of resentment in her manner as she asked him how he had spent the winter. She did not even put to him any but the most ordinary questions about how he had spent the time, though she referred several times in an easy way to Virginia, alluding to her father's death and the Peraldi family as though she were quite aware of, and approved, his intimacy with them. The moment she mentioned Virginia's name Richard's formal remarks and replies became less monosyllabic. He was no longer distracted or bored. Impatience remained, but he could curb it now that he felt underneath Mrs Rafferty's indifferent demeanour a change of attitude regarding the girl and his friendship with her. This change, it seemed to him, she fully intended him to perceive. He noticed that she never mentioned Elinor's name. She asked him to come to Scapa, going so far as to propose taking him back there to lunch, and, when he declined, she begged him to call and bring his friend that or any afternoon.

In an aside to Richard : " Odette is the sweetest creature I ever knew and angelic to me."

It was as though she meant to convey to him how completely Virginia had been replaced.

Presently the party broke up, but not before Hohenthal had extracted a promise from Richard to lunch with him on the following day and bring with him any friend he liked. Again Richard could not fail to understand that the invitation was not extended to his wife.

iv

As they sped across to Aquafonti Baddingley expressed pleasure.

"Delightful meeting my old friend Mrs Prothero here in such a nice way."

Richard was thinking of Virginia. Where was she? How could he find her? He could regard one danger as removed, at all events for the moment. Mrs Rafferty had obviously transferred her interest to Mademoiselle de Mirepoix, but this made him still more anxious to see Virginia. He wanted to tell her and hear what she had to say about her former patroness's change of heart.

They found Elinor posed in front of the belvedere. The wisteria was in full bloom and certainly made a wonderful background. Cholmondeley Robinson seemed immensely pleased with himself, and was dancing about in front of the picture with his mahlstick in his hand, but he turned round at their approach. Baddingley started to give Elinor an account of their morning experience. When he mentioned Mrs Rafferty she looked at Richard curiously. He had not been listening. He was considering whether it would be an opportune moment to call up Casana and had decided to wait until later, as this was their luncheon hour and the Contessa would be quite likely to come to the telephone.

Elinor asked him a question but had to repeat it.

"What did Mrs Rafferty say?"

"She said—— Let me see. Oh, the usual sort of thing."

His answer was careless, but it was intentionally evasive. He was unpleasantly conscious of the awkwardness of talking about Mrs Rafferty's attitude in front of Elinor's friends, but Baddingley then made a remark that could not fail to attract Elinor's attention.

" I thought she was most kind ; she asked us to come to lunch any time—wanted me to see her garden. She must have a beautiful place."

Elinor's eyes again questioned Richard. He knew he would have to stand the fire of cross-examination at the first opportunity. It came quickly. Robinson disappeared with his picture and Baddingley followed him.

" Did she really ask you to lunch ? " Elinor began.

" Yes. She was very polite."

" Only that. Not cordial ? "

" I suppose she was cordial. What does it matter ? "

" It does matter. It matters very much to me."

" Why ? I don't care a damn whether she's civil or not."

" To you—but what about her being civil to me ? Do you care about that ? "

Richard felt embarrassed. Virginia's revelation at Sismondo was in his mind, but he affected unconcern.

" I care, yes, in a way. I mean if her not being civil could harm you in any way. But how could it ? "

" What a question to ask ! Will you never understand that a woman can always be harmed by the spite of other women ? "

" As long as your husband protects you—— "

" Protects ? Your protection won't protect me from her impertinence. You've had a taste of it. What sort of a character d'you think she's given you ? "

" I don't know and I don't care. Besides, she's perfectly satisfied now."

" Satisfied ? What do you mean ? "

Richard tried in a few words to explain how Mrs Rafferty had spoken about Virginia to him. This evidently impressed Elinor, for she said nothing until they entered the house. Then she turned round suddenly.

" Did she ask after me ? "

Richard hesitated for a second.

" Oh yes. The usual sort of thing."

Elinor at once showed satisfaction, but he asked himself whether it would not have been kinder in the end to have told her the truth.

They were finishing luncheon when the telephone bell rang. Richard at once left the table. To his great relief Virginia's voice answered.

" I'm at Casana."

He poured out a flood of questions. Where had she been ? What had she been doing ? He had hunted for her everywhere. Had her mother said anything ? Could he see her ?

Her reply conveyed to him that someone, possibly Madame Peraldi, was listening to the conversation.

" Mother wants to ask you about letting Casana."

He was on the point of asking hastily what on earth she meant when it struck him that he had better take the enigmatic utterance for granted.

" Please tell her I'll come and see her this afternoon about it."

He heard her repeat the message. The next word was " Good-bye."

" One minute," he pleaded breathlessly. " Do tell me how you are."

As the deep, guttural " I'm all right " came back to him, Elinor issued from the dining-room, followed by her guests.

" My, how tender we are ! " she remarked with sarcastic inflection.

Richard was about to reply angrily when Robinson interrupted him with some innocuous remark and his annoyance passed.

V

Baddingley was told off to remain with Elinor at Aquafonti while Robinson accompanied his host to Casana. Richard was to send back the motor-boat for them and join them later at Casabianca.

The taking of Robinson was a shrewd move of Richard's. Contessa Peraldi was awaiting them alone, neither girl was in sight. The moment she alluded to the letting it was quite apparent to Richard that he was supposed to have a tenant in view. The idea had, of course, never entered his head, but he recognised it as a cue and did his best to respond when

Robinson unexpectedly took up the running with : " I know a man who'll jump at it."

Cholmondeley Robinson now became a person of supreme importance and Richard dropped into the background. The whole place had to be shown to the little man, who was immensely flattered by the Contessa's warm cordiality. The artist was a snob of the genial and simple kind. As he added titled people to his acquaintance, he made the most of them to each other.

The tenant he had in view was not, he told the Contessa, a gentleman of rank, because he was American. On the other hand, he was very rich and would spend lots of money on the place. He was a friend of a great friend of his, Lady Mountjoy, the beautiful Lady Mountjoy whose portrait by himself had (it was to be inferred) created a sensation at last year's Academy.

Madame Peraldi was a very naïve person. Of uncertain origin, she was easily impressed, and had no notion whatever of social differences. Her daughters were always greatly amused when she laid down the law to them on such matters, adjuring them to be on their best behaviour on a particular occasion when the Duca and Duchessa di Pordenone, or some other notability, came to call. Invariably they seized the opportunity as a signal for outrageous behaviour on purpose to provoke the poor lady and cause her to exhibit her simplicity by an outburst of anger, or at least to betray ungoverned resentment.

Madame Peraldi led Robinson out of the *scuderia*, talking to him in a mixture of Italian and English. She spoke Italian incorrectly with a strong Germanic accent, which accounted for her daughters' guttural pronunciation. Robinson would have understood as little had she used the purest Tuscan. Grasping an occasional English word, he wagged his head and gesticulated in what he believed to be the expressive foreign fashion, with odd little ejaculations mostly in what he thought was French.

In the midst of this Richard managed to escape and finally discovered Virginia in the boat-house, a huge building reached from the garden by a tunnel under the road. On the water

lay a number of boats of all sizes and shapes. She was sitting cross-legged on the deck of a racing-cutter sorting sails and ropes, and was apparently so absorbed in her work that she did not notice he was there.

At his call she looked up, uttering the familiar " Hulloa ! "

" Shall I come down to you ? "

" If you like. But look out, she capsizes easily."

He got on to a rope ladder dangling from a gangway round the wall and descended till he was on a level with her head, swinging to and fro. She grasped him by the calves, pulling her craft under him.

" Jump now."

He let go and fell on to her. The light, flimsy thing, shaped like a great tray, heeled over and deposited them both in the water, she still holding his legs and he head downwards. He tried to make for a sort of raft with iron rings in it used as a buoy, but she held on to him, and down they went again, a confused medley of arms and legs. Her head was somewhere under him, and, as she rose again, she carried his legs upwards on her shoulders, so that he hung with his head under water, choking. He shook himself loose and came to the surface, gasping ; his hair was over his eyes and he had swallowed a lot of, by no means clean, water. They struggled on to the raft and sat in their drenched clothing looking at each other. She began laughing and he joined in.

" Hulloa ! There's your hat."

She was into the water again, head first, striking out for the entrance. She came back with the Panama in her strong white teeth and clambered up again beside him.

The weather was none too warm, nor was the water. Richard's teeth began chattering.

" You're blue," she said. " I'll give you some dry clothes."

She jumped into a fat little dinghy and, loosening the moorings, made him get in. Piloting it across, she made fast to one of the fixed step-ladders, up which she ran like a monkey. He followed slowly, oozing water.

At the far end of the boat-house a space was boarded off for a dressing-room, formerly used by the late Count and his

crew after yacht-racing on the lake. Into this she disappeared.

" Here's a towel for you," she called from within.

He found her overhauling a bundle. She extracted from it a pair of blue sailor's trousers and a jersey, which she threw to him.

" What about you? "

" Me? I've often worn these."

She pulled down a tarpaulin sheet suspended from a rafter above, and he heard her wet things fall on the wooden boards with a plop as he began taking off his own.

" I'm supposed to be going to Casabianca."

At this they started laughing again, so heartily that they did not at first hear someone calling.

" Look, there's Pietro." Virginia touched his arm.

The man was trying to speak to him from the motor-boat, which lay outside the entrance to the boat-house. The signora had told him to come and fetch *il signore* and his guest.

Richard told him to lie to outside.

" I suppose I shall have to go over and change. Damned bore." He looked waveringly at Virginia.

" Why don't you send him with a message? " she suggested.

Pietro had backed away in obedience to his orders and was out of sight from inside.

" I'll send him presently," Richard said.

Virginia was squeezing out his clothes, hanging them next her own on a rope. He sat down on a heap of sails and watched her. She looked more like a boy than ever, like a fisher-lad wearing his father's trousers. She had suspended them from her shoulders by a stout piece of cord for braces and had rolled them up to the knee.

" I'm trying to sell the boats," she remarked. " I sold one this morning."

The unlooked-for bathe had for the moment put it out of his head to ask her where she had been.

" So that's what you were doing."

" I sold it to Uberto Devoli, the one who plays tennis."

He was about to ask her a question when there was the sound of a whistle.

"That's Brigita." She placed two fingers on her teeth and produced a horribly shrill sound, laughing when he put his fingers in his ears. Brigita peered at them from the steps leading to the tunnel. Cesare Sismondo was with her.

"*Sei pazza!*" the older sister shouted.

"*E tu,*" Virginia's voice echoed back.

A rapid interchange followed of which Richard could not understand a word, but that it was lively was evident from the girls' expressive features and the grin on Cesare's ugly mouth. It ended in Brigita looking annoyed and turning to go. Richard called to her:

"What's up, I say?"

Brigita came towards them, still followed by the youth. Nodding her head towards Virginia, she remarked:

"She's a fool."

Virginia shrugged her shoulders and went on wringing Richard's socks.

"She makes up a story and doesn't tell me a word," Brigita continued.

Virginia came forward with a sock in her hand.

"I made up! You said it. Mother said so. Ask her."

Cesare joined in in Italian, supporting Brigita.

"Shut up." Richard threw the words at him savagely and the youth collapsed.

Brigita laughed. Her sense of humour never allowed her to be angry for long. "Your friend's a funny man. He and mother are behaving as though they had known each other for years, and they can't understand each other a bit."

Brigita finished with a peal of laughter.

"By the way, you might give him a message for me. Tell him I've had a ducking, and he's to go on to Casabianca in the motor-boat and send it back for me."

"What did you say his name was?"

As he spelt it out for her and she repeated it, he heard Virginia say something about Mrs Kurt being angry if she were kept waiting.

"Yes, that's it, 'Chum-m-ly,'" he repeated; "and,

Brigita, never mind about sending back the boat, I'll row myself back in one of yours."

Brigita and her shadow, Cesare, departed.

"You were quite right about Elinor," Richard said.

"I thought she might be angrry."

The girl had finished hanging up the things and she moved towards the tunnel.

"Where to now?" he asked, following her.

"I'm going to see Boso. He's at the farm."

She quickened her pace, then ran. Dodging behind some shrubs, she raced along a small path concealed from the house, which led, with many twists and turns, steeply upwards. He followed, out of breath. She threw herself on a wooden seat built round a tree at the side of the path and crept round it, craning her head forward.

"Sh! Sh!" She put her finger to her mouth.

They had climbed a couple of hundred feet in the few minutes' swift run. The tree grew on a sort of headland. From its other side there was a clear view of the house, garden and lake. Voices came up to them indistinctly. The figures of Madame Peraldi and Robinson, followed by Brigita and Cesare, came into sight. Outside on the lake Pietro was manœuvring the motor-boat to the stone steps in the harbour wall.

It was obvious to Richard that Virginia intended evading the others so that they might be alone together. But why did she make a mystery about it? He did not attempt to conceal from her his desire to be with her. Ought he to put it into words now that he knew she felt as he did?

He had still not recovered his breath when she got up again. He asked no question, but walked beside her. She pushed in front of him, striding so swiftly in the wet canvas shoes on her bare feet that he could not keep up with her. His feet were unstockinged too, but his brown leather shoes were sodden and heavy and hurt him.

"Can't we sit down somewhere?"

"In a minute."

She led on until he saw that they were on the road to the farm, but, as they approached it, she jumped on to a broken

wall and slipped down the other side. He followed clumsily. It was not high, but he was tired and footsore. She had sat down with her back to it. He did the same.

" I wish I had a cigarette."

She drew her case from her pocket.

" But don't smoke now ; you're out of breath."

" I'm dying for one."

" Wait a few minutes longer."

She rose to her feet again and, keeping under the wall, led on to the end of the field, where she climbed back over it. Scrambling after her, Richard saw before him the little stone barn where she had sought shelter from the rain on the day they had talked about the nuns.

The rope was not hanging down this time and the barn door was closed. For an instant Virginia looked puzzled ; then an idea seemed to strike her. Stooping down, she searched in the coarse grass growing round the base of the wall.

" I thought so. Give me your back."

She held up an iron pin triumphantly.

Richard stood with his arms against the wall. She was on his shoulders in a second, forcing the wooden shutter open. It came loose and she threw it inward.

" Look out ! Stand fast ! "

Using his shoulders as a lever, she gave a jump and with an effort wriggled into the barn.

" Wait," she called.

He heard her rummage about inside. Something hit him on the head. It was the rope. Without waiting, she made her end fast within. Richard was not good at swarming, but, as his chest reached the level of the floor, she seized him under the arms and hauled him in. He threw himself on the hay, panting. Through half-closed eyes he watched her carefully replace the wooden door. Then she sat down opposite him and took out her cigarette-case.

" Now you can smoke," she said, handing it to him. " There are matches inside."

He lit a cigarette, inhaling great mouthfuls of smoke.

" I'm done to a turn." His drowsy comfort was complete. " I think I shall stay here for ever. Do smoke."

She refused.

" There are only three, and I don't care for smoking like you do."

What a good sort she was, so unselfish. And what fun these adventures were.

He looked at her through his closing eyes. She was piling the hay together, making herself a bed. How clever she was at this sort of thing. A child of nature, if ever there were one. How different from Elinor and all those other women. This was the real sort of life ; the other was a tedious sham. If only, if only——

What was that sound ? He opened his eyes, wondering where he was. He had been asleep, of course. What woke him ? Virginia was speaking. What was that she said ? He stared across at her. She lay on her back, with her head on one arm ; her lips were moving, but her eyes were closed. She was talking in her sleep. " Boso, quick ! Quick, Boso ! " she was saying. She was dreaming of the dog. She seemed to be having an adventure. She began moving her arms about wildly. She struck at something, making incoherent sounds. Her legs moved. She lifted herself up and down, turned over on her face. She must be dreaming of swimming. Her movements became violent. He went over to her and touched her gently on the shoulder. " Wake up, Virginia, wake up." She still continued throwing herself from side to side, muttering incoherently. He touched her more firmly, began shaking her. Her breath came in gasps, her shoulders and chest heaved, she flung wide her arms. He took hold of them and pulled, almost lifting her from the ground. She tore them away from him and with a wild movement grasped him round the legs, locking her arms together so that he overbalanced and fell upon her. She continued struggling violently, pulling him to her so that he could not free himself. Her mouth opened and shut like a dog's about to bite. Suddenly she fastened upon one of his calves with her teeth and bit him so that he could not help exclaiming aloud : " Virginia, stop ; you're hurting ! " She let go and wrestled with him, hurling herself upon him so that he feared that she would injure herself. She twined her

trousered legs round him, holding him as in a vice; her muscles were like steel; he gave up trying to free himself. He let her throw him about, use him as she liked. His alarm had given place to amazement at her strength, and now he was no longer amazed. The terrific wrestle with the girl roused him. Clasping her supple, writhing body in his arms he used all his strength and, lifting her well off the floor, threw her on her back in the hay. At last she was exhausted. She ceased struggling and lay panting with wide-open mouth and closed eyes. The perspiration ran down her face in great drops, glueing her hair to her forehead. Gradually, as he watched her, her breathing became more regular. She lay motionless. The minutes passed. She had turned over on her side and was apparently sleeping as calmly as a child.

"Virginia." Once again he stooped over her, touching her shoulder quite gently.

She sat up, rubbing her eyes. He saw that the whites were bloodshot.

"I dreamt I was drowning. Did I talk?"

"Yes. I was frightened."

"Frightened? Why?" She gazed at him with utter surprise in her grey-green eyes.

"I thought some harm might happen to you."

"Naw. I often have dreams like that. Then I walk and talk in my sleep. At first they were frightened, but it's nawthing."

For a time they did not speak. She took out a handkerchief and rubbed her face, then threw her hair back and tidied it with her hands.

"I wonder what time it is."

She pulled the rough door to the side and peered out.

"About seven, I think."

"I'm afraid I must be going," he said.

She got up and again put her head out, looking to right and left, then took the rope and threw it over the doorway. He made no move, but sat looking at her.

"I don't want to go, you know."

She pulled the rope in again.

"Your wife will be ang*rr*y if you're late."

" It isn't that. It's you I care about. Virginia, look here. This sort of thing can't go on."

" What can't ? " She looked at him with astonishment.

" I mean I—— " he stammered.

" I'll row you back."

" Hadn't I better go alone ? Supposing we meet your mother or Brigita ? " For the first time he had a feeling of guiltiness.

Instead of answering, she threw out the rope, saying : " You go first."

He slid down, bruising his hands. She followed, carefully closing the door first. Then she replaced the iron pin.

They had not gone ten yards before a youth overtook them on the path. He saluted Virginia and at a few words from her ran on ahead.

" He works on the farm. I told him to let out Boso."

Waiting till the lad went through a gate some distance farther on, she put her fingers to her mouth and whistled. In another moment the huge beast came bounding towards them, manifesting exuberant delight at seeing his mistress.

They reached the boat-house without meeting anyone. While he made her dinghy ready, she put his things together, making a great roll of them. She made the dog jump in, then let herself down by a rope, and handed him his pocket-book, cigarette-case and other articles.

" I'm afraid your watch is spoilt," she said, as they pushed out into the lake. " I'll have it done for you. There's a Swiss in the town who knows."

He handed it to her, but she shook her head as she rowed.

" Naw. Give it me another time. I might lose it."

She swung to her oars easily, as tireless as though she had been resting all day. He watched her, sitting in the bows with the huge dog between them.

" Aren't you ever tired ? "

" Why should I be ? I've been sleeping all the afternoon nearly."

In a few minutes they would be at Aquafonti. He was loath to say good-bye.

" If I had proper clothes and some cigarettes I wouldn't go in yet," he was speaking his thoughts.

" But you must eat."

" We could go to some *osteria*."

He liked flirting with the notion, although he knew he would not do it. He would have liked to stay with her, but the desire was not strong upon him then. It was more a vague hankering with a promise in it. And he wanted to observe her response to his suggestion.

" Naw. You had better go in. Mrs Kurt will be ang*rr*y."

The reiteration of the expression in her guttural accent mildly irritated him.

" Why do you always say angry? I don't care a damn about her anger."

" She's your wife, isn't she? "

" Well? "

He looked up at her, and she looked down at him, as she bent forward to the long sweeping stroke. She uttered her barking laugh.

" When one's married one has to do things. Munro had to. He told me so."

" Told you what? "

" About his divorce."

Richard reflected a moment, made up his mind.

" Sometimes I think I'll get divorced."

He watched her face intently, anxious to see whether what he said affected her. She showed not the slightest sign of surprise, only laughed her short laugh again as she answered :

" It doesn't seem difficult in England. Here one can't."

" I'm thinking seriously of it," he went on.

" I don't think so."

" Why? "

" I don't knaw. Because you're good."

Was she trying to be ironical? He looked at her inquiringly, repeating her word :

" Good? "

" Yes. You let her do what she likes. Mrs Rafferty said it."

They were close to the villa. He could see shadows on the blinds in Elinor's bedroom. She was dressing for dinner.

"Stop rowing, Virginia. I want to know when I shall see you. To-morrow?"

"I'm going to take the skiff to Uberto Devoli to-morrow."

Instantly there rose within him a wild feeling of jealousy mingled with distrust. Devoli? He remembered him—rather a good-looking young man studying law at Milan University. His promise to lunch with Hohenthal came into his mind. While she was delivering the boat to this Devoli he would be miles up the lake. He was consumed with jealousy at the thought. He must do something, but what?

"What time are you going to take the boat?"

"Why?" Her tone expressed innocent surprise.

Forcing himself to speak unconcernedly, "Because I thought you wouldn't mind taking my watch to be mended first. And perhaps you could borrow one for me meanwhile. I really need one."

His ruse succeeded.

"Of course. When shall I give it you?"

Richard thought a moment.

"I've got to lunch at Hohenthal's. I could tow the skiff up for you on my way."

Virginia agreed with alacrity. He was to be at Casana at eleven and she would have the watch for him.

She landed him at Aquafonti and pushed off immediately, Boso taking his place in the bows. Waving his hand to her, he ran up the steps with his damp bundle, feeling as though a load had been lifted from him.

CHAPTER XII

i

Richard did not see Elinor until he joined the party at dinner, to which Baltazzo had been invited, but she had no intention of ignoring his failure to put in an appearance at Casabianca.

"Where were you when Pietro went back for you?" Elinor asked.

"Up at the farm. We went for the dog."

"How very odd!" The inflection of Elinor's voice was coldly sarcastic. "Pietro went up there to find you and you couldn't be found."

Richard closed discussion by shrugging his shoulders. This sign of indifference was not lost on Baltazzo, who leered towards Elinor meaningly.

Richard cared, if possible, less than he appeared to, but his thoughts went uneasily to Virginia. How would she explain matters to her mother?

The conversation became a little strained, but was enlivened as the champagne began to flow.

After dinner talk reverted to the Peraldi family. It seemed to Richard as though it were impossible to keep them off the subject. Robinson was possessed by it, and Baltazzo appeared to be longing to show how much he knew about the Peraldis and their affairs. His remarks, less restrained after copious libations, became more personal. Robinson, unaccustomed to hearing this free discussion of the nobility from the inside, was obviously impressed by Baltazzo's cynical remarks about this new titled friend and her family.

"Brigita is trying to catch young Sismondo."

"You don't mean that young man with the pale face—a marquis something?" Robinson asked eagerly.

Baltazzo continued with an oracular nod.

"But she won't succeed."

"Why?" Elinor was all ears.

"Dry up, Ugo," Richard broke in.

"Wet blanket as usual," Elinor muttered, with a sneer.

Richard swallowed his coffee and got up.

"Let's have a look at the camellias, Baddingley."

He had noticed Jason's face when Elinor spoke, and knew the invitation to leave the others to their gossip would be welcome.

For the rest of the evening Richard avoided any attempt at discussion with his wife. Strolling about the garden with Baddingley they got on the subject of music, and Richard was inveigled into becoming his guest's audience while he improvised very badly after Wagner on the indifferent grand piano in the Louis-Seize drawing-room. It had been painted old gold colour and made use of to show off a magnificent piece of brocade, in the centre of which Elinor had placed a great silver vase full of flowers. Baddingley was enjoying himself enormously when the others entered, but it was clear that Elinor, at all events, was not sufficiently compensated by his improvisation for the disturbance of her decorative arrangement. The brocade had been thrown on a chair and the silver vase deposited on the floor. With a withering look at the unconscious Jason, whose eyes were directed ecstatically to the ceiling, she replaced both, not without unnecessary noise, on the bare space at the end of the piano, and resumed conversation with the other two men. Richard took the opportunity to leave the room. He was a prey to uneasy thoughts about Virginia. Had there been trouble at Casana, and how had the girl explained their disappearance? He had not dared to telephone; besides, it was much too late. Virginia's habit was to go to bed before eight, unless she took it into her head to pass the night in a boat or in some other unusual place. He went into the library and poured himself out a drink. Then he took up the paper and tried to read. Finally he gave it up and went to bed.

Evidently he fell asleep at once, for it was only shortly after midnight when he was awakened by Elinor, who

unceremoniously flared the electric light in his face. She stood at the foot of his bed in her evening dress, with her arms resting on the brasswork.

" Pray pardon this unusual visit," with an affectation of formal phrasing, " I've no designs on you."

He lit a cigarette and waited.

" You are so secretive, and keep such curious hours, that I thought you might be gone in the morning."

He still remained silent, half stupid from the sudden waking.

" May I ask whether you will honour us with your company at lunch to-morrow? Mrs Prothero and Lady Daubeny are coming."

" I'm afraid I can't. I promised to lunch with Hohenthal."

" Oh, indeed! You've a strange idea of the way to treat your guests."

" I've told you before, they're not my guests. You asked them, and you can't complain if I leave you to entertain them. Not that I want to go to Hohenthal's. I'd much rather not."

He did not add that the prospect of lunch at Aquafonti was equally unattractive.

" Evidently that's why you accepted."

" I let myself in, but I'm not going to argue about it."

" You could have said you had friends staying. In any case, it's bad manners to ask you without me."

" It isn't. He's living *en garçon*—and he told me I could—— "

He was on the verge of saying " bring a friend " when he remembered Virginia.

" What did he say? "

" I can't remember exactly."

" May I ask if you propose to keep the motor-boat all day? "

" Not if you want it." Richard began to see light and stopped to consider. " Do you want it? "

" I promised to take Lady Daubeny and Mrs Prothero up the lake in the afternoon. In fact, I rather think they want to call on the Prince."

" Oh, that's all right. I'll send—I mean I'll come back directly after lunch."

" Thank you kindly." Elinor walked out of the room with

dignity and without wishing him good-night, while Richard congratulated himself on having an excellent excuse for leaving Hohenthal's immediately after the meal. Before then he could come to some arrangement with Virginia.

Though his mind was relieved on that point he could not sleep. He went over the events of the afternoon, from the incident of the capsizing boat to when she left him. He could find no solution to the riddle he asked himself about the girl. In all his tangled experience he had known no one in the least like her, nor did he remember ever having heard of a man being placed in so extraordinary a position as his. By far the most puzzling part of Virginia was her apparent guilelessness. But it was asking too much to expect him to believe that she was fast asleep during such happenings as those in the barn. He reconstructed in his mind the earlier scene at the mill. That had staggered him; but it was nothing to the later one; and if it could be admitted that such a thing could take place once, surely reason rebelled against its repetition. Then the journey in the bullock-wagon. Could any girl be so simple, so completely artless, as to invite physical contact of so close a kind as that without realising its inevitable consequence? And if she was aware of the results to which she was exposing herself, what a vista of determined deceit that conclusion opened up. He lay revolving these considerations quite calmly. His brain was unusually clear after sleep, and the emotions of the day were now succeeded by an access of mental energy. His will was in charge, and he could think out the situation without physical effects. Was it possible that the three separate incidents were mere links in the chain of her design, and that with almost unimaginable subtlety she had deliberately planned to ensnare him? If so, she had, for instance, upset the boat on purpose. When she did it she calculated upon his being unable to keep any appointment until he had changed his clothes, and she had determined to use her wits to detain him. When she ran up the path the barn was in her mind. The dog was a mere pretence. Her scheme was to get hold of him, to force him to minister to her desires, to make him her slave.

Richard was entirely emancipated from the sentimental tradition which stamps as degrading to the woman physical desires which are permitted to the man. The attitude which girls are generally encouraged to adopt towards men, the sickly pretence that a female is not a human being with human longings, always filled him with disgust. To him feminine artifice employed to gratify a natural desire for love was always excusable. He loathed the cant which exonerates the shallow coquette who seeks to capture a rich husband and condemns a girl for desiring a mate. But it was the amazing duplicity of Virginia's method that he could not understand. What was the object of this deceit? Was she self-deceived also? Did she imagine that by yielding her body, without actually admitting it to him or to herself, she was in some strange way preserving her right to be innocent and to act the part? Were her child life, her child manners, her child thoughts, so necessary to her that she would give up everything rather than sacrifice them? Did she think that this was the only way to preserve her own personality?

To him this lack of frankness, this winnowing of the letter of virtue from the spirit of sham, was the one tremendous fault that was hers, irremediable, unless by some means she cast it away and stood forward for life's lesson, a woman free to dispose of herself as she pleased.

He must, he would, bring her to the test. How, he knew not. If she came through it, well—there was always divorce possible. He did not deceive himself. He knew she could never be the wife he desired, the wife he had dreamed of. Yet her claim would outweigh his right to await the ideal. He would marry her and be as good a husband as he could. But—if she failed under the test, he would at all costs put her away from him. She had become an obsession. He thought of nothing else. This hold on him was unbearable. Through his senses he was a slave to this girl. She could do what she liked with him and would realise it more and more. He knew that, as certainly as day was coming, the morbid longing would return, and that he would be thinking of one thing only, how he could manage to be with her alone.

When Richard opened tired eyes on his morning's letters he observed one from his father. He turned over the envelope, the writing on which attracted his attention. Mr Kurt's calligraphy was characteristic of his personality, very neat, with carefully formed letters. Richard noticed that the address was shaky and, tearing open the envelope, he saw that the margin at the side was not level, and that the spacing between the lines was irregular. His father must be getting much worse. And so it proved. He wrote from the villa in the south of France.

" I am afraid I cannot give you a good report of myself. My cough has become painful and I seem to grow weaker every day. I feel that I may not last long, and for this reason I should like to see you. I had thought of asking you to come here, but I have decided to hasten my return to England. I am anxious to see your uncle and wind up certain business matters, and have therefore decided to leave here on the 25th and travel by easy stages to London. I shall stop a night in Genoa and one in Milan, where, perhaps, you could spend a few hours with me on the 27th."

Richard stopped reading to consider—to-day was the 15th—twelve days hence.

" You will, I am sure, understand and pardon me for saying that I do not feel equal, in my present condition, to seeing Elinor. Please give her my kind messages and let me know if I can count on seeing you. I shall stay at the Hotel Cavour."

Richard swallowed his coffee and immediately began a letter to his father. He began several. He wanted badly to write something of what he felt, but it refused to come. There was too much to say. It was not that he longed to pour out words. His father had never possessed the sympathy and understanding that cause the heart to overflow. But Richard was shocked and distressed at the possible

imminence of his father's death. The ugly idea occurred to him that he was caught unprepared again, as he had been caught when his mother died. There were things that ought to be said. It seemed impossible that they two were to part for ever in this world without mutually laying bare, at least to some extent, their thoughts. To Richard a parting without some such exchange was against nature and eternal justice. He had no longing to embrace his father, to tell him that under all their misunderstandings there had been a deep, abiding love on his side. He knew it was not so. But he did intensely desire to tell him that, though they could not see eye to eye, he recognised his own shortcomings. He did want his father to know that he understood how great his disappointment in himself had been, and that in many ways he had been juster in his judgment than Richard had realised until now. He sat with the pen in his hand thinking. If only he could truthfully say of himself : " I have learnt life's lesson at last. I have found the key to happiness, or even to contentment. It is this—— " But he knew he could not, that he did not know where to look, and that he doubted if such a key existed. Admission that the past had been a failure through his own fault would have some value if he could point to a consoling present, or at least to a hopeful future. But though he would put as good a face on it as he could when he saw his father, he would lack the confidence to reassure him. The best he could hope to do would be to evade confession that once more his journey through life had ended in a blind alley. At last he wrote a kindly letter, expressing his concern about his father's health and his anxiety to see him. But he carefully avoided any reference at all to the perplexities that filled his mind.

Depression lay heavy on him while he dressed. He did not go in to Elinor, having no intention of telling her of the letter. She was at all times the last person he wanted to see when he was sad or worried. He went out into the garden and found Baddingley, whose manner when he said " Good-morning " gave him an impression of embarrassment. His guest had a letter in his hand.

" I'm afraid I must go off at short notice."

" Really? I'm awfully sorry."

" You see it's a matter of pressing business. My lawyer ——"

" Don't bother to explain," Richard interrupted. " I know only too well how these things happen. Have you looked up the trains? I can help you."

They went in to study Bradshaw. Baddingley decided to take the afternoon train *via* the St. Gothard.

" I wonder if you'd let me row over to Casabianca in one of your boats. I'd like to see Mrs Prothero a moment. You see she was to come here to lunch and——," Baddingley again showed obvious discomfort.

" I'll run you across in the launch. I'm just going to order it."

Baddingley laid a timid, detaining hand on his host's arm.

" And would you mind telling Mrs Kurt—I'm so immensely sorry to leave—it's a great disappointment—— "

Richard hesitated a moment.

" I'll tell you what, Baddingley. Write a note and I'll see to it. I won't disturb her now. She sometimes sleeps badly."

While Pietro made ready the motor-boat Baddingley wrote his note and handed it to Richard, who, putting it in his pocket, noticed that his guest observed the action with apprehension.

" Forgive me, Kurt. You see—as I'm going away so suddenly, it may rather upset the luncheon-party. Don't you think one ought to let Mrs Kurt know beforehand. I shouldn't like—— "

Richard reflected, scrutinising the other's face, which wore an uncertain expression. Then suddenly running his arm through Baddingley's he walked him up the terrace.

" Look here, Jason "—he had never addressed him intimately before—" there's been some sort of row between you and Elinor."

The other tried to interrupt, but Richard pressed his arm and continued :

" It's no use saying there hasn't. I know it. But will you oblige me by ignoring it and staying on? Come on, let's call it done. What do you say? "

He stopped short and dropped his guest's arm, facing him squarely.

"But really, you see, I must go back in a day or two anyhow. It's—it's——" Baddingley stammered and broke off.

"A day or two from now is a different matter. Come up the lake with me to Hohenthal's and your friends will join you there afterwards with Elinor."

Richard had hardly uttered the words on the impulse of the moment when he regretted them. He was willing to try to patch things up for Elinor, but not at the sacrifice of his day with Virginia. He saw that it would be almost impossible for him to arrange a meeting with her if Baddingley accompanied him. Luckily Baddingley himself saved the situation.

"Thanks enormously. I couldn't do that. You see I should have to be here for Mrs Prothero. She and Lady Daubeny are coming—er—partly on my account. You see we're very old friends."

Baddingley's anxiety not to be indiscreet in regard to his share in the coming of his friends was characteristic of the harmless, gentle creature whose life was almost dedicated to these niceties of social intercourse.

"Oh, as you like. Anyhow I can destroy this, can't I?"

"You see, it's a little awkward. Mrs Kurt seemed to be greatly offended with me last night."

"Nonsense. How could she be? It's her way. Don't take any notice."

Baddingley looked slightly consoled, and Richard tore up the note.

"You are too sensitive."

"I suppose I am," he said. "I'll go and write to this lawyer chap and tell him I'll see him at the end of next week."

Meanwhile Richard ran up to his wife's room. Elinor was still in bed, but had breakfasted.

"I've only come in for a minute to ask you to be decent to Baddingley. He was on the verge of leaving this afternoon."

"What for?"

"Something you did or said last night."

"What do you mean? I've said nothing. I suppose he

expected all of us to sit still and listen to his rotten strumming."

"I know nothing about that. I got him to stop on because I thought you'd be put out, especially as you've asked his friends. Can't you make it up and have done with it?"

"Make it up? There's nothing to make up."

"Never mind. Ask him to play to you and he'll be perfectly happy."

He went out of her room without waiting for her reply.

As he steered for Casana Richard's thoughts returned to his father. He was so much absorbed in his reflections that he did not notice that Pietro was lying to outside the harbour wall until Virginia called to him. She was in the racing-skiff, which she was manœuvring with a jib and one oar. She quickly hauled in the sail and threw the tow-rope to Pietro, with a mat to protect the hull of the motor-launch. She jumped in lightly beside Richard and they started.

He got little from her about her mother, except that Madame Peraldi, on seeing Boso, had shaken her fist at her, while Brigita had said the old lady was too much delighted with Robinson and his assurance of a tenant to think of anything else. Virginia broke off to exchange some rapid sentences with Pietro. Richard heard the word *podere* repeated several times, and it was evident she was questioning him.

"He says he never went to the other side where Boso is," she remarked to Richard, who, not understanding the abrupt comment, asked what she meant.

"He came to look for us to bring you to Casabianca, and mother told him to go to the farm, that's all."

Richard understood now. She had made Pietro believe they were there by obtaining from him an admission that he had not searched all through the outbuildings, one of which she used as a kennel. This was, he realised, another example of the guile with which she converted a dubious situation into an innocent one, thus causing others to believe their suspicions groundless.

"Was Mrs Kurt ang*rr*y last night?" she asked in her disjointed way.

' Not that I know of. Why should she be? "

" Brigita said so."

What did the girl mean? These elliptical remarks were sometimes intensely annoying. It bored him to ask a lot of questions about a matter to which he was indifferent, but he liked to get to the bottom of things. He detested obscurity.

" Why are you so mysterious? Can't you spit it out? " rather irritably.

" It's nawthing. Only Brigita said Mrs Kurt was ang*rr*y that those people were going to Scapa."

More ambiguity. What a peculiar talent this girl had for making herself unintelligible. He didn't care a straw about the whole thing, but he was determined to elicit the facts. This he succeeded finally in doing, but he thought he had rather annoyed Virginia in the process.

It appeared that Brigita had accompanied Robinson to Casabianca and had found Elinor sitting alone with Baltazzo, while, not far off, Mrs Rafferty was taking tea with Lady Daubeny and Mrs Prothero. Baddingley was sitting at their table, and evidently Elinor had made a spiteful remark about him. After Mrs Rafferty's departure Baddingley introduced Elinor to his friends, but their acceptance of her invitation to luncheon had evidently been cold and induced by pressure on his part. Mrs Rafferty, it seemed, had also found means to ask Brigita to come to Scapa the following day, and had told her that Lady Daubeny and Mrs Prothero were to meet Prince Hohenthal at tea. This was the little imbroglio which lay at the bottom of Baddingley's embarrassment. It was an illuminating example of the female spitefulness Elinor provoked, and from which Richard had on numberless occasions tried to protect her. It was no new experience to him to scent a malignity towards his wife out of all proportion to the petty considerations involved. Now he understood why Elinor had needed his presence at Casabianca.

Meanwhile they were lying off the Devoli villa, and Virginia began hauling in the skiff.

" What are you going to do? "

" I'll get in and run up the sails. Uberto will see. You can leave me."

Did she say this on purpose to rouse his jealousy? He thought his irritable manner had piqued her. Was this to pay him back? If so, she had certainly scored. He was jealous, damnably jealous, and nothing would induce him to leave her with this Uberto. But he was faced with a new difficulty. He had never yet made the slightest attempt at an open declaration of his feelings towards her. He had accepted without protest a situation which denied him the power, if not the right, to object even when she intended doing something that would cause him positive anguish. The means by which she had obtained a hold on him as strong as any open avowal would have secured her, without the responsibility that such an avowal would have entailed on herself, dawned on him in all its amazing subtlety. It filled him with an impotent rage that only added fuel to the fires of his jealousy. Supposing he were now boldly to declare that he would not leave her alone with this young man—what reason could he give that had any force except the true one? And was he prepared on the spot to have it out with her, to tell her bluntly that he knew she had tried to fool him? Supposing she played utter innocence, what could he do? And supposing, alarmed perhaps, or even smitten with the sort of contrition her religious upbringing inculcated, she were to commit a *coup de tête* and go into the convent? No, he dared not risk it; but again he resolved that, sooner or later, in one way or another, he would force the issue. She should have to choose between facing the consequences of her own acts or—— His mind refused to consider the alternative then. Putting aside his thoughts with an effort, he stopped her as she was getting into the sailing boat.

"I don't want to leave you here," he said simply.

"But I must show Uberto the skiff's all right. He's bought it."

"I know he has; and if he's not satisfied I'll buy it."

She looked at him incredulously.

"You! Why?"

"Because I don't want you to stay here. I want you to come up the lake with me."

He spoke firmly; his mind was made up. If she did not

give way he would stay there with her, if he stayed all day.

" He'll want to see that the spars and sails and ropes are all right."

" Very well. We'll see him later on our way back."

She considered for a moment.

" We'll have to anchor her, then."

" Right you are. How do we do it ? "

She jumped on to the light craft and got into the cock-pit. She disappeared, searching under the fore-deck.

" It's all right. There's a stone."

While she sat down on the deck and tied the hawser firmly to it, Richard clambered in beside her. Together they lifted the heavy weight and cast it into the water.

" Now come along."

She followed him into the launch.

" But I must see Uberto afterwards."

" You shall see him."

She gazed towards the large white villa with its garden conventionally planted with palm-trees. From under one of them a tall, thin figure ran out to which she waved her handkerchief and then putting both hands to her mouth shouted : " *Torniamo ! Torniamo !* " while Richard steered up the lake.

iii

Richard knew she was aware that his jealousy had been aroused, and it humiliated him that he could not come to grips with her as he wanted. He was like a man who has claims which he can only enforce by repudiating an obligation with no moral or legal sanction behind it, but binding nevertheless. He believed he had every right to demand loyalty of her, but he was powerless to tell her so until their partnership in deceit was dissolved. For a partnership it was, though an unwilling one on his side, and unless his self-respect asserted itself by forcing admission from her, the relationship must continue with all its evil effects. He fully realised that her hold was only on his senses, and that his weakness in this respect was the measure of her power to degrade him in his

own eyes, to develop that in him which he despised. He knew that what held him was not the honest passion of love a man feels for a woman who is dear to him. He had experienced reaction too fully not to have learnt that if she inspired desire in him she also inspired repugnance. Already he was conscious that, as the morbid desire she had provoked increased, so would the spontaneous counter-action, until, as must ever be in such a contest, the real triumphed over the imaginary. In that day she would be nothing to him, or worse ; she would be a memory from which he would shrink. Yet he felt he had the power to release himself and to help her while there was yet time, if she gave him the smallest opening for frankness.

He was sitting alone in the stern. One could steer from either end, and she had gone to the bows and taken the wheel. It was her favourite seat, getting all the breeze, and he always left the stern rudder when she was in the boat. He went forward and sat opposite her. She was dressed in white again ; now she hardly ever wore anything on her head. She did not move at his approach, but kept her eye on the point she was making for.

" I had a letter from my father this morning. I'm afraid he's failing fast."

She turned her head at once.

" No ? I'm so sorry."

" He wants to see me. I shall meet him in Milan."

She plied him with questions. How long had Mr Kurt been ill ? What was the illness ? How old was he ? Was he alone ? Poor old man, she wished she could take care of him. Why didn't Richard go to him immediately ?

He tried to explain in few words how matters stood. Before that he had told her enough of his past life for her to grasp its salient features, and she knew that his relations with his father, though much improved since his mother's death, were not deeply affectionate. When, therefore, she began talking to him as though she were correcting a child who was being naughty to its mamma, he found it difficult to restrain a feeling of annoyance.

" You don't understand, Virginia. He's not the sort of man one can treat like that. Supposing I told you you ought to throw your arms round your mother's neck and promise her to be good ? "

She was nonplussed at this for a moment, but returned to the charge.

" I feel so sorry for the dear old man. Why don't you go to see him now ? I should if I were you."

" He wouldn't like it. He's made his plans."

" But you could go there in a day and come back the next."

" It really wouldn't do any good. It would simply be taking a tiresome journey for no object."

" You don't mind travelling, do you ? I love it."

" Love sitting in the train all day ? "

" Yes. I love it. I love watching the fields and rivers and trees fly by."

Her childish talk had no charm for him at that moment. He ignored it and tried to concentrate his thoughts.

" And you go all along the sea," she prattled on, " for miles and miles. I've been all the way along the Ligure. It's lovely."

" I should rather like you to see my father when he comes to Milan. You'd understand then."

" I should love to see him. I know I should be fond of him. But I think you ought to go to him now."

Richard looked at her. For an instant the blood rushed to his head and he felt the choking in his throat, but he set his teeth and forced himself to speak calmly.

" Supposing I were to—would you come too ? "

She answered without an instant's reflection, but characteristically :

" I'm sure mother wouldn't mind my going to see your father."

Richard kept hold of himself.

" We might find the connections bad and have to stop somewhere on the road, you know." He watched her face as he spoke.

" That wouldn't matter. I *trrr*ust you," she answered.

When they reached Villa Carlotta Richard showed Virginia a basket.

" That's your lunch, eggs, milk, cheese, cherries. I had it made up myself. There are sandwiches for Pietro."

She fully entered into, and approved of, his arrangement that she was to await him with the boat. There was shade under the trees overhanging the inlet and shelter, if wind came up, within the spacious boat-house.

" I shan't be more than an hour or so," he said, and, wishing her good-bye, he walked up toward the house.

Looking back once, he saw that she was placing cushions in the bottom of the boat preparatory to her inevitable sleep. He could not repress the reflection that it was just as well that Pietro was a particularly unemotional individual and a steady family man to boot. So far had his experience of Virginia brought him that he had altogether ceased to trust her. When once Richard's confidence in a person was shaken he could never believe in him or her again. And this distrust, first-fruit of the desire with which she had inflamed him, was a torture. The moment she was out of sight his imagination got to work and pictured her employing the methods with which he was familiar on anyone whom chance threw across her path. It might, for all he knew, be Uberto Devoli one day, himself the next. How could he know? What he did know was that she was evidently prepared to go off with him at a moment's notice on a journey of uncertain duration and of uncertain possibilities. Yet the astonishing thing was that, until he came on the scene, Virginia, from all accounts —and he had done his best to find out—never had any men friends at all. Brigita had said this, so had her mother. Baltazzo had told him she was known for it, and was regarded as eccentric for preferring to be Mrs Rafferty's slave to taking part in the social life of girls of her own age. And this was the same girl who had determinedly set herself to rouse in him emotions such as he had never before experienced, and of a violence he could not control. By what means had she discovered her power? For, if it was instinctive, she could never have displayed so much deliberate calculation in exercising it.

To his surprise the first person he met when he reached the house was Mademoiselle de Mirepoix. The beautiful young woman accompanied him inside in search of the Prince, who, she said, was showing her friends the garden. She knew Richard was coming, she explained, with a look that at any previous time in his life he would have regarded as more than flattering ; she had waited for him on purpose. She had a manner that, preoccupied as he was, he could not but find engaging. Her voice was soft and musical ; her perfect English was agreeably emphasised by the French accent and occasional use of French idioms. Instead of platitudes about the beauty of the lake or of her host's garden, she engaged his interest with a personal reference.

" I thought you looked haunted that day at Casabianca."

This description of her impression of him pulled Richard up sharply.

" Haunted ? " he asked. The repetition of the word was not mechanical.

" Mrs Rafferty said you wanted to get away from us, but I thought you were looking for someone."

" It is adroit of you to talk about me, Mademoiselle. Men always like that, don't they ? "

This parrying of her question brought a responsive smile.

" I wanted to talk to you then but you gave me no opportunity. Do tell me now, are you never coming to Scapa ? "

" Since you ask me, Mademoiselle, I don't think so."

" What a pity ! "

She put a peculiar seriousness into her tone, dropping her voice. They had passed through the house to the entrance on the other side. No one was in sight, and they moved towards a garden-seat.

" It's very flattering of you to want me to come." Richard was trying to penetrate her reason for making this effort to attract him.

" Yet you resist. I do want you to come, I don't deny it."

" Please don't think me insensible. Shall I be frank ? "

" I don't think you can help being frank." The girl turned her laughing eyes upon him.

" What is the use of explaining if you know ? "

" I don't want you to explain. I want you to come. You see, I don't mind begging you."

" Is it fair to put me in the position of refusing? "

" Don't refuse. Come, come to-day—will you? "

Approaching voices gave him an excuse for not replying. In the distance three persons were coming towards them, of whom one was the Prince. As she spoke he came forward and held out his hand to Richard, who drew him aside, explaining that he would have to leave immediately after luncheon as his wife required the use of the motor-launch.

" There is no difficulty. I will take you in mine. We are all going to Scapa."

Here was a dilemma. To own to his host that Virginia had accompanied him would be not only embarrassing but unfair to the girl. What was he to do? To plead another engagement would be a too obvious pretence after his previous rather over-done expression of regret that he was forced to leave. A few feet away he caught Mademoiselle de Mirepoix' eyes upon him. Meanwhile the Prince, taking his acceptance for granted, suggested walking towards the house, so that he could send an immediate message to his guest's boatman.

There was simply nothing to be done but resign himself and let matters take their course. Yet he was inwardly chafing to a degree that almost robbed him of self-control. Now Virginia would be free, and of course the first thing she would do would be to go to the Devoli villa. His impotence maddened him. Hours would pass before he could get to her, and, meanwhile, what would she be doing? What a fool he had been to come! What would it have mattered if he had been impolite? He could have taken Virginia up the lake and sent the boat back to Elinor, spent the whole afternoon with the girl and had a good excuse for not getting back till late. Elinor would never have known, and he wouldn't have cared if she had. He heard the Prince giving his order and conjured his wits for some plan, but found none. As the servant turned on his heels an idea flashed into his mind.

" May I send a message to my man? "

His host nodded, and Richard, following the servant into the house, asked for pencil and paper.

" *Dearest V.* (he hastily scrawled),—*H. insists on taking me back in his launch. I trust you not to go to Devoli's without me, but to take the boat straight to Aquafonti. I'll see you somehow later—will ring up Casana before dinner anyhow.*

" *R.*"

He handed the servant the note and ten lire. The man's impassive face gave no sign, but Richard caught the reflection of Mademoiselle de Mirepoix' figure in a large Venetian mirror, and saw that she had been a witness of the little incident from the other end of the hall, where she stood talking. As they went into the dining-room she remarked softly:

" I knew Virginia was in the boat."

He was too much surprised to reply.

Mademoiselle de Mirepoix did not chatter. On the contrary, she talked little on end, but she put out feelers, and, when she obtained a response, led him gradually into conversation. He could not have explained why she produced upon him an effect of elusiveness. Her manner was charming, her amiability infectious. Her way of expressing herself was witty, without strain or pose, and her evident desire to please him was too frank and unaffected to be other than gratifying. Yet he felt that with all these delightful qualities there was something lacking, some temperamental deficiency, perhaps, that nullified all her efforts to get the desired sort of hold on his sympathy and imagination. At no moment was his concern alienated from Virginia. This gracious and sophisticated creature, charming though she might be, had not for an instant suggested to his mind an alternative attraction. She was simply out of the running as a possible rival to Virginia, yet Richard would have welcomed any respite from his thraldom, even at the hands of Mademoiselle de Mirepoix.

On the way to Scapa in the Prince's motor-launch Mademoiselle de Mirepoix made a final effort to induce Richard to call on Mrs Rafferty. This effort took the form of a suddenly disclosed interest in Elinor. She had heard so much of Mrs Kurt, she said, and she would so much like to know her. The day had gone for ever when Elinor's interests in social

directions made a claim upon him. He could not guess what Mademoiselle de Mirepoix was driving at and he did not desire to know. But if her purpose was to involve him in an intrigue by dragging in Elinor, he would resist it.

" My wife will be delighted to see you at Aquafonti. I dare say Mrs Rafferty will bring you."

She looked at him curiously.

" I thought you might take me there yourself this afternoon."

" Unfortunately she has gone up the lake with friends, otherwise I should have—— "

She interrupted him with a silvery laugh.

" You are not awfully pressing, are you ? "

This exchange in undertones where they sat within earshot of the others could not, to Richard's relief, be sustained, and for the rest of the way conversation became general. Reaching Scapa, he declined with polite resolution to go up to the house. Mademoiselle de Mirepoix did not attempt to conceal her chagrin when he accepted the Prince's offer of his boat to take him home, and she remained a moment while the others went forward.

" Now you will go and find Virginia."

She made a charming figure against the wisteria-covered wall of the boat-house, with a pink parasol behind her blonde head. Impatient as he was to go, Richard could not help contrasting the attractions of this beautiful young woman with those of Virginia. It was a dreadful waste of charm. He did not in the least understand it, but he knew that the French girl was utterly powerless to break the spell.

" I wish I could help it."

He spoke on impulse, and as the words escaped him he was conscious of disloyalty.

Again the look of curiosity came into her face.

" Then why ? " she asked.

Richard lifted his hat and she had no alternative but to offer her hand.

As she turned and followed the others Richard was uncomfortably aware of her disappointment.

Speeding past the Devoli villa, Richard noticed that the

skiff was no longer at anchor. Instantly he became a prey to suspicion. For a moment he contemplated being dropped there, but, on reflection, decided against it. After all, he had no right to assume that Virginia had gone against his express wish. He did not believe she had, but he was without confidence, and he knew her capacity for devious explanation or excuse. Other men, especially Italians, would most likely take a different view of her subtleties. He could indeed imagine that some would be well enough pleased to play into her hands. Uberto Devoli seemed a decent sort of lad, but he might have seen her often without Richard knowing it. Virginia was quite capable of carrying on a triangular intrigue if she chose, and what right or power had he to assert himself in the case of Devoli or anyone else? On the contrary, Devoli was a young unmarried man, and had far more right to her favours, if it came to that. So Richard went on torturing himself till he got to Aquafonti.

He immediately "called up" Casana. At first no one answered, and when, after some time, Contessa Peraldi's voice came through the telephone Richard promptly hung up the receiver. To arouse her suspicions would do no good and might complicate matters. On more than one occasion she had been taken with sudden panic on discovering the absence of one or the other of the girls, and had sent people tearing off right and left in search of them, ringing up everybody she could think of with wild inquiries as to their whereabouts. Why on earth couldn't Virginia have come in the motor-boat to Aquafonti as he had asked? She knew she could have taken one of his boats to row across to Casana. And the damnable part of the situation was that he had no right to protest. She was not his chattel, nor was she his mistress in her own eyes, whatever she might be in his. It simply could not go on like this; his position was unendurable. It must be one thing or the other. He would tell her so that very day; he would drag some sort of avowal from her. She must and should face the alternatives. He wandered aimlessly into the garden. It would soon be looking its very best when the roses, of which many were yielding their first blooms, were in full flower. Elinor had succeeded wonderfully, trium-

phantly. The camellias, nearly over, but still a mass of faded bloom, had been succeeded by azaleas and rhododendrons. The carved stone bridge over the torrent, and the steps, were almost covered with flowering boughs. Wherever he looked his eyes fell on some beautiful effect of colour or some promise of it. On the balcony round the upper floor of the house stood great tubs, from which the tendrils of climbing geraniums already fell in pink clusters far below the wrought-iron rails. He went slowly up the steps to the bridge and, crossing the drive, pursued his way up the torrent bed. The cinerarias, cunningly protected against the rush of spring floods by cemented stones, were growing into giant plants. He reached a turn in the drive again and stood a moment looking at its long sweep. All along the low wall roses had been trained, and at each corner great terra-cotta vases of eighteenth-century design were planted with cornflowers. What a blaze of blue they would be ! And so on, all the way upwards till he reached the lodge, the white walls of which would soon be almost hidden by the yellow wealth of a Gloire de Dijon rose-tree. Generally it was Richard's habit to go in for a chat with Domenico's wife. She was a cheerful woman with a large family, and during the winter he had often spent a pleasant quarter of an hour smoking by their fire of logs, watching the children eat their *polenta* or looking over their exercise books. But to-day he turned away with only a passing greeting to Flora, although he had not seen her for weeks. He was not in the mood to talk, for he could not force cheerfulness he did not feel. How different everything was from the winter ! He had been quite happy then, living alone and with no superfluity of comfort either. How little that sort of thing counted ! He had enjoyed the cold and frugal, indifferent meals. These occasional visits to the lodge on his way into, or back from, Como over the frozen snow, the companionship he got from Domenico or Pietro, were quite enough relief to his solitude. Then Cyril came, and at first it had seemed so delightful. He ran over the weeks of care-free, ever-growing intimacy with Virginia, his work in the stables, the girls' rows with their mother. The whole gamut of his winter and spring experiences danced

through his memory. And then had come the change. Was it, at least in part, his own fault? He tried hard to be honest with himself, but he could not see how he could have acted, or even have thought, otherwise. As long as possible he had regarded Virginia as the innocent girl her outward actions made her appear. Of course even after her reappearance during Cyril's visit, he could have avoided her. It would not have been easy; indeed the only hope would have been to go away, as his old friend had suggested. And if he had, what then? He would have had to come back eventually when Elinor returned, and what would his life have been then? What would it be now, supposing he gave her up? What was the good of deceiving himself? He knew that there was not a ray of happiness, not a moment's contentment, to be got out of the empty shell of his married existence. He realised now that all this beauty and charm of scene, all the idle luxury of his life, had only made its emptiness more apparent. That idea, the seeking an objective cure for a subjective malady, the creating of an atmosphere of happiness out of material things, the building of a shrine for the worship of nothingness, was the greatest illusion of all. As he pursued his way downwards he no longer looked about him for pleasing evidences of Elinor's creative taste. His feeling towards Aquafonti was ripening into something near akin to hate.

iv

Richard found Elinor and Robinson having tea in the winter-garden. Richard saw at a glance that she was in a bad temper and that the little painter was uncomfortably aware of it. His face lightened when Richard sat down and accepted the cup passed to him by his wife, who did not look up and preserved a stony silence.

"Where's Jason?" he asked, more to break the embarrassment than because he wanted to know.

Robinson, seeing that Elinor made no sign of replying, answered:

"He stopped at Scapa with Lady Daubeny and Mrs

Prothero. Lovely place it looked. To tell the truth, I hoped Mrs Kurt would call, so that I could see it."

He stopped, looking again at Elinor and then at her husband.

"And I told you—— Why don't you go on?"

Robinson fidgeted. His self-inflicted social discipline dictated unwilling reticence, but he was longing to know what underlay his hostess's resentment of Mrs Rafferty.

Elinor cast a withering glance at him and fire leapt into her eyes.

"He needn't be so mealy-mouthed. I told him old Rafferty is a spiteful old cat, and I hate her, and I wouldn't go to see her if she begged me to on her knees."

Robinson's look said: "There, now."

There was a time when Richard would have been humiliated by his wife's lack of dignity, but he had ceased to care. And yet he hankered to smooth things over, to let her down easily.

"You mustn't be so hard on Jason. Mrs Rafferty asked him to come the other morning when she was calling on his friends. I got let in for luncheon at Hohenthal's at the same time. One can't sometimes get out of things."

"Can't one? I can when I choose. Not that I care in the least. He's welcome to live with Mrs Rafferty for the rest of his life. Thank goodness he's going soon, and I sha'n't be bored with his rotten playing and his mooning sentimentality."

With this she gathered together her gold bag and other rattling objects and sailed out of the room.

"I'm sorry Mrs Kurt's so annoyed," Robinson was beginning, but Richard stopped him. He could put up with the scene, but the sympathy of this little outsider was unbearable.

"I'm going over to Casana. Do you care to come?"

The painter jumped up and followed Richard to the bridge.

"Rather!" he exclaimed. "I've had a letter from Mortimer J. Palk."

"Have you? Who's he? Pietro!" Richard called down to the boatman to make ready. He was again wildly impatient to find Virginia.

" You mean to say you've never heard of Palk, the great packer, of Chicago."

" No. Why ? "

" He's the richest man in the Western States. He's told me to take Casana for him. Doesn't care what rent he pays."

" Good."

" I stayed with him at Chicago and painted his daughters. Lovely girls. One's the Duchess of —— the other's married to ——. They'll be coming here—jolly for you—make the lake brilliant—stay with them—cut out Mrs Rafferty."

The words reached Richard's ears vaguely and disjointedly as he sat at the wheel in the bows. A stiff breeze was blowing and he had to steer across the waves with some care to avoid their breaking over the prow.

" You'd better get aft, if you don't want a shower-bath."

Robinson assented with alacrity and scrambled back to the stern just in time to save himself as an unusually high wave curled over the nose of the boat and drenched Richard to the skin. He had looked away for a moment, scanning the distance to see if there were any sign of Virginia. A few minutes later he swung his launch under the wall of Casana harbour.

With the help of Pietro the painter clambered on to the wall.

" I'll be back for you presently." Richard shoved off, heading for Casabianca. Mrs Rafferty would have to provide her guests with the means of getting home. She might, of course, send them by road in her motor, in which case he would miss Virginia, if she had gone there. Anyhow he would inquire at the hotel. So he held his course, swearing inwardly at the uncertainty, but more determined than ever that he would see her somehow that day.

The breeze freshened. It was behind him now. The waves lifted the lightly-built boat and bore it along so that at times the screw was out of the water and he found it difficult to steer. If it got rougher he would have to take shelter at Casabianca and go back by road himself. Pietro left the engine and came forward, asking him to steer under the headland of Bellabocca so as to get smoother water. As Richard turned the wheel the man uttered an exclamation and

pointed. Ahead of them, beating up against the wind, was the small racing skiff, close-hauled and reefed until the jib looked the size of a pocket-handkerchief and the mainsail no larger than a tablecloth. For an instant Richard hesitated then, turning the wheel again, he made straight for it.

It was a foolish thing to do, for the launch was not built for heavy seas, and if the motor got flooded they would be helpless. But Richard did not stop to think. He intended to reach the sailing boat at any cost. What happened afterwards didn't matter. The wind and waves were doing the work, the screw was out of the water as much as in it, and they tossed about like a cork, but so far they were shipping no water. Pietro had pulled up the rubber mat that ran the length of the bottom and made a sort of defensive work round the motor with it and the cushions. Rapidly they approached the skiff. Richard strained his eyes. That was her figure in white, but she was not alone. There was someone else. Devoli was with her, of course. Richard drew in his breath. A demon of jealousy seized him. "By God!" he muttered, and then again: "By God!" They were huddled together on the extreme edge of the deck at the stern. Close reefed as she was, the skiff was heeling over until her bits of sails seemed almost to lie on the water. But the cockleshell, Virginia had told him, was as safe as a lifeboat, impossible to capsize. They were close now—not two hundred yards away. Only then he realised with rage the sheer uselessness of his enterprise. Even if he left Pietro to manage the launch alone, how was he to board the skiff? At the best of times Richard was unskilled in handling anything bigger than a rowing boat. In that sea he knew he was utterly incapable of getting alongside. If he tried to, he would certainly smash the launch, possibly the skiff as well. But he held on, confident in Virginia's capacity to rise to the emergency. She would tell him what to do when the time came. As he gazed ahead he saw her jam the tiller down and tack. It was beautifully done, just at the right moment, and the light skiff swung into the wind again with scarcely a tremor in her sails. A second later the mainsheet fell, the jib flapped, she lay bobbing uncertainly. He could see Virginia

plainly now. She put her hands to her mouth and shouted, but he could only distinguish one word : " Terno." Richard yelled at Pietro asking what she meant. The boatman shrugged his shoulders and kept his eyes on his engine ; he evidently thought the whole proceeding foolhardy. Richard steered straight for the skiff, keeping as close as he could. Now they were within hailing distance. She hung over the stern, lying on her stomach with one hand to her mouth, the other on the tiller, her bare legs hanging over the cockpit.

" There's a good harbour at Terno. Keep under the shore."

" And you ? " he shouted back.

" We'll follow."

They were side by side now, not twenty feet apart. Devoli was standing in the cockpit with his hand on the mainyard, ready to haul at a word from her. For the first time he saw that there was a third person in the boat. The dishevelled head of Baddingley appeared close to Virginia's legs.

Unable to make head or tail of the whole business, but still raging in his heart, Richard steered for Terno. Looking back, he saw that Virginia had set her shred of a mainsail and was running before the wind, close on his track.

Richard left Pietro to see to the motor launch and, jumping into a small boat, rowed alongside the skiff as Virginia brought her into the harbour. While Devoli dilated with enthusiasm upon the merits of his new purchase, Baddingley expressed profuse gratitude to his skipper.

" I thought my last hour had come." Virginia poked fun at him as he got into Richard's boat.

" That's nawthing. Not half-a-gale," busying herself in berthing her ship.

So far Richard had not said a word to her, and she steadily avoided his eye. But he did not budge from the side of the skiff. It took some time to make fast. Virginia insisted on leaving everything shipshape. Then she disappeared into the cockpit to put on her boots and stockings, carefully wrapped in an oilskin. Finally they got into Richard's boat. Virginia behaved as though she were in high spirits, chaffing Devoli on his appearance. They were a bedraggled party.

Baddingley was dryest in places, but had sat in a pool of water and looked dejected and uncomfortable.

" I had no idea I was coming in for that sort of an experience when you offered to sail me back," he said to Virginia.

" The *tramontana* comes up queekly, the only thing is to reef down queek also."

They walked on abreast towards Devoli's villa, which was some two miles on the road to Como. Virginia ignored Richard completely and started a voluble conversation in Italian with Devoli about the skiff and sailing generally. The young man spoke English well and Richard's irritation grew.

" Can't you talk English ? " he broke in rudely.

She uttered her short, barking laugh.

" Oh yes, if you like."

He knew she was purposely annoying him. He didn't care, but he meant not to give her a chance of talking to her companion without his hearing what she said. Devoli, quite a pleasant youth, with nice manners, could not fail to notice Richard's surliness. The latter was aware of this, but his friendship with Virginia was too well known for the youngster to be ignorant of it. If he did not want to accept it he could take the consequences. Richard was in no mood to be conciliatory, but Virginia, who as a rule had nothing to say, was loquacious.

" Did you feel sick-sea ? " she asked Baddingley.

" Not exactly ; but I was jolly glad to get ashore."

" You ought to have gone back by road," Richard remarked.

" Well, you see, there were five ladies to go in the motor and Miss Virginia offered to row me ; then we saw our young friend sailing and he took us on board."

So that was how it happened. Richard was thinking. He was not satisfied, but he did not mean to ask any more questions then.

When they reached the lodge at the top of the garden Virginia announced her intention of borrowing a boat from Devoli and rowing across to Casana. For an instant Richard was dumbfounded at her audacity ; then he whipped out :

" You shall do nothing of the sort. You've done enough

larking for one day, and I don't intend you to get drowned when you've been in my company. I'm responsible to your mother. Come along."

She made an attempt at argument, but Richard knew perfectly well it was to provoke him, and that she had no desire whatever to row across in the gale. Unaccountably, he was certain that she was quite indifferent to Uberto Devoli. It was the scantiest justice to the young fellow to admit that he said nothing to encourage her. She gave in with the manner of a little girl to her governess, bidding the boy an effusive farewell, and, as they walked on, she ostentatiously kept on the other side of Baddingley. Aquafonti was rather over a mile farther, and Virginia never stopped talking, but addressed herself entirely to the gentle Jason, plying him with questions of all sorts and manifesting an extraordinary interest in his replies. So much so that he was quite enlivened, and, when she suggested that he should come and bathe with her and Brigita the following day, he was delighted.

" We'll all go. I'll fetch you in the *batello*. Mr Robinson too." She didn't mention Richard. " It's always fine after the *tramontana*. Brigita will bring Cesare. It will be lovely."

V

At Aquafonti lodge she refused to go down to the villa. She would walk to Como, she said. Her bicycle was there, being repaired, and she wanted to get it anyhow. So Richard asked Baddingley to go on with a message from him :

" Tell them not to wait if I'm not back by dinner-time."

Virginia protested, but Richard was firm ; he had made up his mind to accompany her and have an explanation.

Along the first hundred yards he said nothing. She increased her pace. It was not much over a mile to Como, and there was a short cut down some steps which led immediately into the outskirts of the town. Once they got there it would be difficult for Richard to talk freely. He knew that she was intent on avoiding discussion and he was equally determined not to be balked.

" Look here, Virginia," he opened suddenly, " I must have a talk with you. I don't want to go into the town. Up there we can sit down for a moment."

He pointed to the mountain-side at their left and took hold of her arm.

" I shan't be able to get my bicycle, and mother will be angry."

" Rot ! " he answered angrily. " You don't mind if your mother's angry when it's something you want to do, and I'll send you back in a cab."

" What do you want to talk about ? "

" I'll tell you in a minute. Come on, don't make me beg, I don't feel like it."

His manner was decided. She shot a glance at him from her green eyes and uttered her short, hard laugh.

" I don't want you to beg, but you are funny."

He still held her arm, and she allowed him to lead her to a steep path through the low scrub which fringed the road. He scrambled up it, pulling her after him. A couple of hundred feet above, there was an old mule-road, long disused. It was the precursor of the metalled highway which still ended at Terno. Beyond that village the mule-path became again the only means of communication, except by water, with the farther hamlets on that side of the lake.

" *Wiow !* " she called out.

He was pulling her after him somewhat roughly, regardless of thorns and brambles. One of these had caught her linen dress and, before he could stop, had torn a great hole in it.

" Awfully sorry," he gasped, breathless.

She put her hand through the rent and, in doing so, tore it wider. He could see that her breeches under it were wet through. In his angry impatience he had forgotten that they had not a dry stitch on them.

" I'm afraid you're soaked. I ought to get you home at once, but I must say something first. If you keep warm it won't hurt you."

" I don't care."

They were on the path. A few yards away stood one of the small half-ruined shrines which occasionally dotted the old

mule-road. Taking off his flannel jacket, he threw it round her shoulders and pulled her down by him on the broken flags.

" Naw, I won't." She tried to throw it off, but he held it firmly over her chest with one hand, while with the other he clasped her round the waist. Both were breathing hard after the rapid climb.

" Keep quiet, Virginia, and listen to me."

She continued to struggle with him, so that he had to use some strength to restrain her. As she resisted he exerted himself more. He seized her round the legs and threw her across him, but she wriggled away, and it became a sort of rough-and-tumble wrestling match. The sense of her warm body against his, her breath upon his face, the smell of her wet hair and her skin, suddenly overwhelmed him. Again came that sensation of overmastering desire, painful in its intensity, a desire to hurt or be hurt—to destroy rather than to possess ! A mingling of rage and of pain that had to be assuaged, and could not be until . . . She fell upon him and seized his hand with her teeth, biting hard. He pulled it, bleeding, away. The pain maddened him still more. He crushed her body to him and held her as in a vice with his legs and arms so that she could not move. She lay panting in his embrace. He put his mouth upon hers, but she tore her face away, burying it in his chest. He had to loosen his hold from sheer fatigue, and she broke away, standing, with her knuckles on her hips, looking down upon him.

" You see you can't make me," she gasped through her sobbing breath.

" Make you what ? "

" Put on your coat."

Richard got up. The delirium had passed, but he was unmanned.

" I'll take you into Como."

They walked along the path which led down to the main road, a little farther on, at the short cut to the town. At that point she stopped.

" You'd better go back now. I'll run from here."

" Virginia." Richard took her hand, gently this time, and

forced her to face him squarely. " I can't go on like this. Do you care what I feel ? "

" Of course I care."

" Then why do you do things that you know make me unhappy ? "

" Unhappy ? "

" Why didn't you come straight back as I asked ? Why did you go to Scapa ? "

" Because I promised."

" Promised who ? "

" Brigita."

He knew this was a subterfuge and did not pursue the question.

" Why won't you be straight with me ? "

" I am."

" No, you're not. You knew I didn't want you to see Devoli without me."

" You never said so. You said not to go there. Besides, your friend had to get back."

" There you are again. Virginia, listen. Will you do what I ask you in future ? "

" I always do. Odette said I was very good."

" Why ? "

" Because I didn't mind your leaving me and going to lunch with other people."

" You know I'd rather have been with you. What else did she say ? "

For an instant she hesitated, then gave her short laugh.

" She said—you—you were in love with me."

" And what did you say ? "

" I said you couldn't be because you're married."

" What did she say then ? "

" Nawthing. Mrs Rafferty got angry."

" Angry ? Why ? "

" She told Odette she believed she was in love with you too. She said one was enough, and Odette said you wouldn't look at her because—— "

" Go on."

" Because of me."

" Well, that's true. That's why I think I've the right to expect you to do what I ask you."

" But I'm not your wife."

" Would you like to be ? "

" You don't want to marry me. You love Elinor too much. You're not like Munro. You are kinder. You would never leave her."

" If I did, would you come away with me ? "

" If you got divorced ? "

" I didn't say that. Divorce would come afterwards."

" I don't know. I don't understand."

" Will you think about it and tell me ? "

" When ? "

" To-morrow, if possible."

" I'll try."

He had been holding her hand during all the time they had been speaking. He lifted it to his lips gravely but she pulled it away.

" It's not fit to kiss. Good-bye."

She was about to dart off, but he caught her up and stopped her.

" I must see you to-morrow. What time ? Where ? "

" Come and bathe with the others. It will be such fun."

" My dear child, can't you give that up ? "

" I will, if you like, but it will be lovely. We'll duck your friend the artist. Do come, won't you ? "

" All right, cut along."

She ran down the path and he turned back, thinking.

What a child she was after all ! If only he could believe in her and trust her, would it be such a mistake to marry her ? He felt drawn to her again in the old way. Her youthfulness fascinated him. Richard had been robbed of his youth and, for that reason, loved youth the more in others. And there lurked within him a strange uncertainty. Had he given her a proper chance ? She was still a riddle to him. Did she feel towards him something she could not feel for another man ? Had he roused her sex instinct without herself realising it, so that she had been taken unawares ? Were his suspicions groundless in so far as her acting in the same way to other

men was concerned? She had never shown the slightest interest in anyone else since their friendship had begun. Evidently Mrs Rafferty had been furious at Mademoiselle de Mirepoix' interest in the affair. Why, unless she was jealous? And if this was the reason, Mademoiselle de Mirepoix must be to her now what Virginia had been. Yet could two girls be more dissimilar? From the first moment he saw Virginia he was conscious of her sex—just what he did not feel with Mademoiselle de Mirepoix. It was all very puzzling, but perhaps the solution of the puzzle of Mademoiselle de Mirepoix would supply the explanation of the riddle of Virginia.

When Richard reached the villa the butler informed him that Count Bernasconi had arrived unexpectedly and was then dressing for dinner. Richard was rather pleased than otherwise; the more men there were about, the freer he would be. Knowing Elinor as he did, he was not surprised to find her temper improved. The faithful Baltazzo had turned up, and the four men were standing round her chair in the winter-garden in attitudes which suggested greater or smaller degrees of devotion. She was making herself charming to Bernasconi, and, when Richard appeared, she introduced the new guest as "Tito, who was such a dear to me in Paris." Baltazzo screwed his face into a smile as he shook hands with his host, but, relapsing into sulky ill humour, he eyed "Tito" vindictively as he bent over Elinor. Robinson came bubbling up to Richard.

"I say, old chap, you forgot all about poor little me. I waited till the last moment and then had to telephone for a carriage."

"You mean old Madame Peraldi did. A two-horse one, and it cost him twenty francs. He's awfully sick about it."

It never took Elinor long to discover people's weaknesses. The painter, so she told her husband, was "damned mean." On the journey out he had paid for nothing, even leaving her to give her own "tips." Evidently she had confided her discovery to Baltazzo, as he chortled with delight at her remark. Richard had, in truth, completely forgotten that he had left his guest at Casana.

" I'm so sorry. Did Baddingley tell you about our adventure ? "

" Donna Brigita came back in Mrs Rafferty's motor. By Jove ! she's an extraordinary woman. I'd like to paint her."

Baltazzo glanced at Elinor, whose expression was vicious.

" Why don't you offer to ? I dare say Jason could manage it for you, she's such a great friend of his."

Elinor's voice was heavily weighted with sarcasm.

Baddingley protested gently.

She turned her back on him with a sneer and began talking to Bernasconi in undertones with overdone vivacity.

During dinner the conversation was entirely personal. Starting at the head of the table, where Elinor sat between Bernasconi and Baltazzo, the badinage found an easy butt in Baddingley. Robinson initiated discussion about Mademoiselle de Mirepoix. She had accompanied Mrs Rafferty and Brigita to Casana. All three had turned up at the *scuderia*, much to the painter's satisfaction ; he now talked quite familiarly about the Contessa and her family as though they were old friends.

" Topping girl, Brigita—made Mrs Rafferty climb up the steps. Jolly steep they are too."

Bernasconi, a small, light-haired man, in the blue uniform of an Italian cavalry officer, appeared to be greatly interested. His bird-like face was unsuitably decorated with an upturned moustache of the bristling Prussian sort. He had an amusing giggle which he made use of without discrimination until it became wearisome, but this lent him the spurious success almost always secured by the hilarious. The giggle was accompanied by little eager gestures and squirmings of the body. He had a way of twisting himself round and jumping up and down on his chair when he talked. He spoke broken English, but understood it better than Baltazzo. These two, the one from Turin, the other from Milan, confined themselves to French when they addressed each other, which they rarely did.

" The Mirepoix girl said her brother lives over his stables too. He's got a private staircase into it from his bed-

room. Kisses the horses good-night before he goes to bed, I suppose."

Robinson looked round the table, expecting general amusement at his sally, but even Bernasconi for once did not giggle.

" Ah ! Raoul de Mirepoix. He has his stable at Chantilly, and sleeps over it since they poisoned his mare, Mayflower."

The painter subsided, feeling he had made a fool of himself, and a discussion of the brother and sister followed.

Baltazzo, of course, knew all their family history, and a good many of what he called *détails inédits* regarding the lady. This interested Elinor a great deal more than the names and pedigrees of the brother's race-horses which " Tito " was pouring into her left ear. She turned her attention for the first time during dinner to Ugo, who, delighted to gratify her curiosity and his own love of gossip well spiced with salacious innuendo, felt he was scoring off his rival.

At a given moment there was a silence, which generally happens when two of a company are anxious to exchange a confidence.

" Can't you talk, all of you ? Ugo wants to tell me something."

Elinor bent her head towards the Milanese.

" *On dit qu'elle est une*—— " His bloodshot, bibulous eyes leered above the hand he placed beside his mouth as he whispered the additional word.

" Tito " heard it, as Elinor intended he should. His giggle of enjoyment was evidence of that. But Robinson did not. He looked at one and the other inquiringly, anxious to be in the know.

" By the way, Mrs Kurt, the French girl wants awfully to know you."

Laughter from the three at the end of the table saluted the innocent remark. Looking puzzled, he said sheepishly to Richard :

" She does really."

Baltazzo's guffaw, Tito's giggle and Elinor's toneless titter chorused again.

The bathing party duly came off. Robinson immensely enjoyed being ducked by the two sisters. The ducking consisted in one of the girls diving underneath him and seizing his legs, while the other did leap-frog over his head. These antics were kept up for some time, and Richard, getting sick of them, got back into the *batello*. Baddingley was shy at first and swam about in a lady-like way by himself, but Brigita swam after him and, turning on her back, gave him a shower-bath with her feet. Cesare had refused to come, which apparently by no means displeased her. At all events she and Jason became so friendly that, on the way back, they started discussing what they could do together that afternoon. It ended by her asking Richard to take them all up the lake in the motor-boat. When Virginia, who stood rowing in the bows while Richard looked after the stern oars, expressed delight at the suggestion, he assented.

"How lovely! We'll go to the *latteria* at Traverso and drink cream."

She had thrown off the large bath-gown and was rowing in her bathing-dress, as Richard was in his. The three others were sitting under the awning in their bath-gowns, looking rather like Arabs. All the arrangements for the bathe had been made by Virginia, who had rowed over for them.

As they glided up to Aquafonti water-steps, Elinor, in a delicate turquoise-blue *peignoir*, appeared on the balcony above, with "Tito" in full regimentals in close attendance. She watched the proceedings with a cold, disdainful eye, but the sisters were not in the least abashed.

"Mind you come early for us," Virginia called, as she pushed off.

"May I ask what arrangements you have made with your friends?"

Elinor was awaiting Richard on the bridge, and looked over the top of her two guests' heads, as they walked into the house in their long bath-gowns, looking a trifle ridiculous.

Richard told her. "Of course you and Bernasconi will come too."

" Very good of you. So I've got to be saddled with those two hoydens the entire afternoon." She turned angrily on her heels and walked into the house.

" What did you want to do? " He got no answer.

Richard was pretty certain she had no plans of her own. She very rarely had; for Elinor was entirely without initiative. What she liked was for him to propose something, and then, either to turn it down or throw cold water on it. He knew, too, that she did not particularly want to be alone with " Tito." She never liked being alone with an admirer for long. They all bored her sooner or later, and Bernasconi was not the kind to prove an exception. What she really liked best was a *partie à trois*, consisting of herself and two suitors who were thoroughly jealous of each other. Failing this, she preferred Richard to make the third. His personality lent her a certain prestige, though for worlds she would not have admitted it, and it had the effect of stimulating the devotion of the particular gallant in hand at the time. He had been through this often and long enough to know that she was now only playing the part of a dog in the manger. She was vaguely but spitefully resentful that the bathers had enjoyed themselves. Not that " Jason " was any use to her. He had never been for a moment under her charm, though she had imposed at first on his gentleness. He was one of those men who like being managed up to a certain point by a woman if her method is tactful. But Richard knew that Elinor shocked and frightened him, and that under his mild manner there was a clearer perception of his hostess's character than she imagined. As for Robinson, he could never exist for her except as a lay figure or a butt. She had simply taken him up *faute de mieux*. A cleverer woman than she would have been only too glad to get them both off her hands with the two girls, but one of Richard's greatest difficulties had always been Elinor's remarkable faculty for standing in the way of her own interest. He was not himself keen on the *latteria* party, although he meant to find means of being alone with Virginia during the afternoon.

During luncheon Robinson was irrepressible in his tribute to what he called " those topping Peraldi girls." Elinor's

disparaging comments did not silence him, but, when she went so far as to talk about their " indecent behaviour," Baddingley protested in his gentle, deprecating way.

" Really, Mrs Kurt, I assure you not. They were like schoolgirls."

" You're a simpleton, Jason. You remind me of Richard's friend, Cyril Franchard. If a woman accosted him in Piccadilly he'd invent some story to explain that she was an innocent virgin."

Bernasconi's giggle relieved the tension ; Elinor was highly susceptible to appreciation of her incisiveness.

To Richard's relief Baltazzo turned up after lunch in his launch, bringing with him his niece, Principessa dal Fazzo, a pretty little woman, recently married. " Tito " had reached the stage familiar to Richard, when he hung on Elinor's every word and sought permission or approval for everything he said or did. Whatever line she took he followed, running at her heels like a terrier. For this reason, if for no other, Richard knew that she would very soon be sick of him. She loved to reduce her suitors to pulp, but, having done so, she quickly got to the point of positively hating them. There was nothing that bored Elinor so much as a passionate lover.

Baltazzo's arrival smoothed matters over, and the party divided into its component parts, Elinor and Bernasconi going with Baltazzo and his niece, while the others went with Richard, whose motor-boat was much the faster. He had run across, picked up the Peraldi sisters, and started on his way up the lake, before Baltazzo's launch had left Aquafonti. Doubtless Elinor was trying on various hats and veils. She always took special trouble about these things when there was a woman with any pretension to smartness in the party.

Gentle Jason was positively gleeful. Cesare Sismondo had again been disposed of ; Brigita evidently wanted a change and was making the most of her opportunity. She used her large dark eyes and mocking smile with great effect. Robinson had a return of æsthetic enthusiasm, and became lyrical to Richard about " the wondrous colour of lake and sky," and the " unique values " of " bits that ought to be done."

Richard did not much mind. His eyes were fixed on Virginia steering in the bows. Her thick bronze hair had grown ; it reached the base of her neck now, and was blown out behind her like the locks of an angel in a mediæval picture. As long as he could see her, and know she could not get away from him, he could be patient. He would have her to himself for an hour somehow before the day was over. If he went and sat by her, Robinson, whose skin was unusually thick, would probably change his seat also, and, if he didn't, Brigita would make some excuse to send him to the other end of the boat. Richard wondered idly how far Brigita would go with Baddingley. He was of the susceptible kind, and unsuspecting. If she wanted to marry him she would not have much difficulty, and a decent English gentleman of sufficient, if not abundant, means would be a better match than that scrofulous Sismondo, with his nasty, slothful ways. Suddenly Virginia called out to Richard. He got up and went to the bows.

" Shall we call at the Lavernos and ask Maria ? "

Maria di Laverno, a girl of about twenty, was a great friend of the sisters. Richard had often met her at Casana and played tennis with her. She was a hearty girl, not at all of the Italian type, her mother was American.

This suggestion of Virginia's met with immediate encouragement. Richard, bidding her steer for the Lavernos, went to the stern and told Brigita.

" Maria ! Splendid. She'll turn your head, Mr Cho—Chol—— "

" Robinson's easier," Richard suggested.

" But he likes to be called the other, don't you, Mr Chol ——? He explained it to mother—she didn't understand a word—all about his grandmother. You can tell it to Maria, she'll love it."

Brigita rattled on with her chaff, accompanied by laughter. Robinson was a little embarrassed, but not really aware that she was ridiculing him. She went on to tell him about the Lavernos, touching up her account of them in a way that was likely to impress him.

" She'll tell me back all he says," she whispered in Richard's ear.

Maria di Laverno accepted the invitation with alacrity. As it happened, she was sitting on their terrace wall with her little brother, who was fishing. She wanted to get a hat and wrap, but Virginia insisted on her tumbling on board just as she was.

"We've got plenty of wraps, and you look lovely."

The girl had a broad, freckled face and sandy hair, the good looks of one who lives much in the open air. Her wide mouth, with its white even teeth, her short skirt, showing a well-shaped pair of legs clad in transparent silk stockings, gave the general impression of a free and easy person.

Brigita introduced Robinson to her.

"He paints pictures of all the beauties in England. Perhaps he'll paint yours."

They were off again. Richard, going forward, saw Baltazzo's launch in the distance behind them.

"At last," he said, sitting down by Virginia.

"I asked her on purpose."

Richard's heart throbbed. Was she going to admit frankly she wanted him to herself? She had never yet owned as much.

"It was a grand idea of yours fetching your friend. I was wondering how on earth I could get to talk to you."

She turned her green eyes upon him.

"You see I wanted——" She hesitated. "You know what you said about my thinking——"

Richard looked back at the others; the two couples were busy talking. Brigita's head was very close to Baddingley's.

"Well, dear?" There was more than a hint of tenderness in his encouragement.

A flush stained her cheek an instant and died away.

"There's something I haven't told you."

"A new mystery! What's that?"

"About—don't say anything to anyone except Brigita—I'm going to Australia."

"To Australia! Good God! what for?"

"I want to go. Dear old Fanny is there."

"Who's she?"

" Our old governess ; but she isn't very old. She married a farmer in Western Australia."

" The most god-forsaken wilderness on earth. What in heaven's name put such a thing into your head ? "

" We've often talked about it with Maria—Brigita and I. She wants to come too. That's what I meant."

There was something absolutely baffling in this sudden switching on of a new project. She seemed to take a peculiar delight in springing fresh sensations upon him. So this nonsense was at the back of her wanting her friend Maria to come. Could she really imagine he was going to take any part in their ridiculous schoolgirl plans of adventure, and mix the other girl up in their business ? She must have some reason of her own. What was it ? For, underneath what appeared to be the ingenuous scheme of a madcap girl, he felt again that there was an oblique explanation. His hopes that at last she was going to be frank fell to zero. Even if she did care for him, what use was that if she had not the courage to own it to him ? Was it possible that, to preserve in his eyes the guise of innocence, and to act that part to herself, she would go to the length of involving a third party, and that a girl younger than herself, in her intrigue ?

The *latteria* was a farmhouse in the Swiss style, with stalls below for the half-dozen Jersey cows. It was prettily situated, standing back from the lake under the mountainside, on the upper slopes of which were the pastures. In front of the chalet tables were spread under the trees, and on fine afternoons in the season months these were rarely unoccupied for long. Villa-residents, hotel-visitors from Traverso and Ravolta found it an agreeable object for a trip in the inviting awning-covered boats.

Richard's party arrived early and so had the place to themselves. Virginia immediately went in search of the farm-manager, who, like others of his kind, was a special friend of hers. She sent him flying for bowls of cream, *panetone* and strawberries, while she arranged the tables, refusing Baddingley's polite offers of assistance. Richard knew her ways too well to interfere, and sat under the trees watching

her preparations curiously. The pains she took were characteristic. She was conscientious to a degree in all such matters, priding herself on the domestic capacity which she undoubtedly possessed. Notwithstanding his disappointment, Richard was again deeply under her spell. She looked, he thought, more attractive than usual, and was at her best in these practical matters. One of her qualities certainly was that she never minded work of any kind within her powers, and was quite content to play her useful part without either thanks or appreciation. Her indifference to the elegancies was underlined by a positive preference for being ignored in a social or intellectual sense. There was not a shade of affectation in it, and she was as incapable of envying those whom the world flattered and admired as she was of competing with them. If ever, Richard reflected, he had known a girl cut out to be the wife of a ranchman, a tea-planter, or a dweller in the waste spaces of the earth, it was she. But he was not, and never could be, that type of man. Once he had thought he could, but he was a boy then, and had paid dearly enough for his illusion. Could he ever be so mad as to risk the experiment again for the sake of this girl whose body was all she had to give?

By the time Baltazzo's launch appeared everything was in readiness. Elinor's arrival was stately. Tito stepped ashore first, and handed her out of the boat with much show of deferential care, as she stepped gingerly in her high-heeled shoes up the plank to the shore. Madalena del Fazzo tripped after her with Bernasconi, and Baltazzo brought up the rear with a sulky expression on his bloated countenance.

Elinor deigned to be gracious, and Robinson, who only discovered that Baltazzo's niece was a principessa when he found himself sitting next her at table, delighted Brigita by his effusive remarks. He treated her as though she were a royalty, in which behaviour Brigita encouraged him by various signs and by doing so herself. The little lady knew there was some sort of a joke when Brigita addressed her as "Madame," and used the third person in offering her some more cream, but she was too shy before so many strangers to say anything, and Robinson became more and more im-

pressed. Elinor, sitting at the other end of the table between Baltazzo and Bernasconi, apparently did not take in the by-play.

In the midst of the entertainment Pini arrived with a party in a gondola, the only one on the lake. He came gushing self-consciously up to Elinor, expressing the hope that she and her friends would come on to him afterwards. He had Donaldo, the great tenor, staying with him. That was he in the gondola. The lady was Miss Frick, the American heiress. He had only come to get some cream, as he was expecting a few friends. Would Elinor promise? Elinor promised with dignity, introducing him to the principessa.

"*Quel rasta!*" Baltazzo muttered, as the *cavaliere* glided away.

Bernasconi, agog with interest, wanted to know who he was.

"His father was a bootmaker in Buenos Ayres." Baltazzo's thick lip curled with contempt, but Elinor turned on him.

"Shut up, Ugo. What does that matter? He knows everyone. You needn't come if you don't want to."

At this Baltazzo kept silence, and Robinson began questioning Maria di Laverno, who looked at Brigita.

"He's a *cavaliere*," remarked the latter, as though this inferior distinction in itself settled it, "of the Order of"—she mumbled some rubbish—"and he gives wonderful parties and gets himself photographed in all sorts of costumes. Tell him you think he's beautiful, and he'll ask you to paint his portrait."

When it came to the question of who was going on to Pini's Maria protested she wasn't dressed for it, and, on Brigita saying that she wasn't either, but intended going if only, she added in an aside behind her hand in Italian, to see Robinson make a fool of himself, she laughingly assented. Richard declined. One of the boats could come back for him afterwards; he intended to stay where he was.

"With Virginia," Elinor suggested.

"Yes, with Virginia," he repeated, as his wife exchanged meaning glances with Ugo.

Virginia had disappeared after seeing that everyone was served. Richard had noticed this without surprise, and, when the launches started, he went in search of her. He found her sitting in the living-room of the farm-manager with a couple of small children beside her. She was holding a huge bowl of cream to her lips. The children's faces were smeared with strawberry-juice; they had all three been enjoying a private feast. Richard sat down by them happily.

"They've all gone."

Virginia expressed surprise.

"Back home?"

"No. To Pini's. He turned up after you disappeared."

"Did Maria go too?"

He nodded.

"What a pity!"

The two children looked at them with eyes that expressed wonder at this unknown language. She pulled out a handkerchief and wiped their faces, then dismissed them to their mother.

"Why did you say a pity?" he asked, as they strolled upwards through the grove.

"I wanted her to ask you about Australia."

"I say, Virginia, I wish you'd drop that rotten idea. If you said British Columbia even, but Western Australia! You've no idea what a beastly country it is, and it takes months to get there."

"I knaw—one rides for four days to get to the farm."

"You aren't really serious about it? I mean you haven't made up your mind?"

"I wrote to Fanny some time ago. It's not a new thing. Ask Brigita, she knows."

"Why do you want to go?"

"I don't want to stay here, and I want to live out of doors and ride and have horses and dogs."

"You need not go to Australia for that. You need not go farther than Ireland. I'll take you there if you like."

"You couldn't do it."

"I can and I will. It only depends on you."

"How could I?"

" How could you what ? "

" How could I go off with you like that ? "

They had reached the end of the little wood and emerged on to grassy slopes. He was about to throw himself down, but she pointed upwards.

" Let's go higher ; it's nicer."

Even at that moment he felt her lack of frankness. Why couldn't she say : " It's safer."

They followed the zigzag path for some distance. At a point where they could look back and see the lake spread out before them she stopped, and they lay down side by side in the long, sweet-smelling grass. He gave her a cigarette, lighted it and his own, inhaled a deep breath and began to talk.

" This is my idea. I have never made any secret to Elinor that some day I might want to be free. For years I've told her that if—if ever I came across a woman I wanted to marry I should ask her to divorce me. Now I tell you that, if you say yes, I'll leave her, but—— "

She interrupted him. She showed plainly that she didn't want to hear what was coming.

" She might not let you."

" Refuse, you mean ? She can't."

" You wouldn't do it. She might be sad. You couldn't like that, you're so good."

" It wouldn't be easy, but I will do it if you say yes." He looked at her earnestly. " I mean this."

She did not answer. She gazed at the lake, covered with bright flashing dimples, and blew a mouthful of smoke into the soft air, watching it as it wreathed away.

" Virginia, what is your answer ? " he persisted.

" I'm not fit to be your wife. I'm ugly, and I don't know how to dress up, and—— "

" That's my affair. I shouldn't expect you to. You like children, don't you ? That's more important."

" I love them."

" Well, would you like to have a child of your own ? " He watched her face closely as he asked her. She didn't move her eyes, but a very slight smile flickered round her large

mouth. At the corners of it he noticed the dark golden down above her full red lips.

" Why do you say that ? "

" Because it's a natural consequence of marriage."

She seemed to be pondering his answer.

" But you're married already. Why haven't you any children ? "

" Because Elinor wouldn't have any. Now it's too late."

" Why ? "

" Because we don't love each other. You know that, or I shouldn't talk of leaving her. Virginia, give me your answer. Shall I leave her ? "

" When ? "

" Now—to-morrow, any time you say."

" How could I ? What would mother say ? What would everyone say ? I don't care for myself."

" If you don't care, say you'll come. God knows I don't."

Richard spoke passionately. He meant every word he said. He was ready, more than ready, to throw everything over. He was weary, beyond words, of his life. And yet he knew that he would not take the final step unless she went with him.

" Why don't you wait until I go to Australia ? "

" And go with you ? "

" With me and Maria. It will be lovely on the sea. We might go in a sailing ship. Brigita would love it."

So this was the wonderful scheme, a sort of glorified schoolgirl adventure under his auspices.

" How do you know Maria would come ? Her mother would probably object."

" Naw, naw. Her mother said she didn't care."

" What's the use of mixing Maria up with it ? Give up Australia and come with me. We'll go to British Columbia. It's a beautiful country, with mountains and plains and forests. A glorious climate. We'd live on horseback. But I can't play at it with a lot of girls. It wouldn't answer anyhow. Brigita couldn't stand a hard life."

" Maria and I could go first. Then you could come afterwards if you wanted to."

" And what should I be doing all that time ? Just hanging about ? No, it can't be done like that. I'll go anywhere you like, to Australia even, if you insist, but you must come with me. Will you ? "

" I don't knaw. I must think. There's your boat."

She jumped up and pointed to the lake. The launch, with its white awning, was scudding through the gleaming ripples towards the *latteria*, a thousand feet below them. They walked downwards slowly, and Richard did not speak another word. He saw through her purpose now. She was ready to accept him on her own conditions, and one of these was that, at all costs, she intended to save her face. How far her childish scheme was a genuine product he could not be certain, but in any case it was clear that she meant to avoid scandal. There would be every justification for that if she would frankly admit it. But this was exactly what she would not do. And could anything be more unthinkable than that he should throw up everything and go off to the Antipodes without a clear understanding with her ? Would she give him up if he forced her to choose between burning her boats and losing him ? And, if so, was he prepared to accept that alternative ?

CHAPTER XIII

i

Elinor expressed relief that two of her guests were gone, and said she would not be sorry when Tito followed them. Richard did not know, nor did he care, whether this was true, but the morning before his father was due to arrive at Milan he announced the fact to her for the first time.

"I may have to remain the night."

Elinor made no comment, and he added:

"I tell you in case you prefer Bernasconi to go beforehand."

"You mean for appearance sake?"

"Yes; or possibly for your own."

She tossed her head.

"Pshaw! It makes no difference to me one way or the other. I can lock my door if he threatens to be obstreperous."

Richard let the question go at that. He no longer cared to disguise his indifference to her doings or to her criticism of his own, and her acrid comments on his constant telephonings, his comings and goings to and fro by unconcealed arrangement with Virginia were, he knew, well earned. He took no pleasure in provoking them, but he was past attempting inventions to account for his frequent absences and abrupt departures. He was well aware that this state of things could not continue, but, without exactly welcoming the crisis that he realised was impending, he was so fully prepared for it that it gave him no concern.

The evening of the 26th he went across the lake after dinner. On these occasions he always rowed the dinghy with the high rowlocks, so that he had his back to Aquafonti

as he went, but he knew that Elinor and "Tito" were watching him away, and he could imagine that he was affording his guest the amplest possible excuse for pressing his attentions on the neglected wife. He made a reference to this when he climbed up a rope ladder in the boat-house, where Virginia awaited him. He did not intend to let her pretend to herself or to him that she was unconscious of the significance, and of the consequences, of their intimacy.

"Bernasconi must think I'm a most obliging husband," he remarked.

"Why?" she asked innocently.

"I leave the coast clear for him. He can make love to Elinor as much as he likes."

Virginia's answer was unusually sagacious.

"As much as *she* likes."

"I believe she's bored with him. Anyhow, I don't care. The whole thing's got to come to an end. I think I shall tell my father to-morrow."

"Poor old man. Won't it make him unhappy?"

"Unhappy! It will be the best piece of news he's had for a very long time. That's just why I don't like telling him."

"I don't understand."

"You know I've always told you that my family hate Elinor. That's one of the reasons I've stuck to her so long. I couldn't leave her to their mercy. That's my trouble now. I'm not altogether independent. I can't settle money on her. And I owe a lot at Aquafonti still."

They were sitting on bundles of sails in the cubicle where Richard had changed after falling into the water. She had hung a lantern on the wall, and it glimmered fitfully. It had been a fine evening, but, as darkness fell, a warm haze obscured the stars, and inside the boat-house the outlines of the boats were but dimly perceptible in the gloom.

"That's another reason not to go away yet," she said.

"Go away?"

"I mean what you said about my going with you. How can you—like that?"

Without knowing it, apparently, she had hit on the weak

point in Richard's half-formed plan. It had always been in his mind when he proposed to take her away, but he had not thought out a solution. He would clear out if Virginia made up her mind to go with him, whatever the consequences, but, if that happened, he knew later on he would suffer remorse. That was, in a sense, the conscientious side of Richard's character. He could make up his mind to leave Elinor, but he could never have left her with the bag to hold. He would be able to give her a large share of his settled income, but he could not dispose of the capital ; and to clear out, leaving debts behind him, was out of the question.

" That's why I think I shall tell my father. But if I do, and he helps me, will you come away with me when the time comes ? "

" Why can't you come afterwards when I'm at Fanny's ? "

" So you're on that damned Australian idea again ? "

The girl gave a half laugh.

" It will only be a few months. Then we can go somewhere else."

" It won't do. It's no use to me. You've got to stay with me or—— "

He broke off because he had not the courage to threaten. If she accepted the alternative of his leaving her, and he believed she was so sure of her hold on him that she was quite capable of it, he knew he would not have the courage to face a divorce. The prospect of the long cold wranglings and distresses of legal procedure, with nothing to keep him going meanwhile, was one he did not feel equal to. To go clear away, putting himself in the wrong, and giving his solicitor instructions to make as handsome an arrangement as possible for Elinor, was a different thing altogether, but he would not go alone. It was his physical desire for Virginia that made it worth while to risk inevitable reaction, if not actual disaster afterwards, but, so far from there being any solid foundation for marriage, he was even then certain that a protracted separation would, if he could steel himself to it, cure him of his obsession.

She interrupted his thoughts by a characteristic switching on of a new idea.

" May I come with you to-morrow? I'd love to see your father."

The suggestion was welcome. Richard had been uneasy at leaving her. Besides, her company before and after the meeting would be comforting. But, it suddenly occurred to him, supposing he had to remain the night? He looked at her; the blood rushed to his head. But he answered calmly:

" Yes, if you would really like to—only I don't know, till I see him, whether he will be well enough—— "

" I'll come and wait. You can telephone."

The blind alley into which their previous talk had led seemed no longer to exist, and when, after an abrupt good-night, Richard started homewards his mind was busy working out a new solution of his perplexities.

If his father saw Virginia and took a fancy to her, it might make matters easier for him. The money obstacle would not prevent him from going away with her, but, if it were removed there would be nothing to stand in the way but herself. And if, on the other hand, her coming were to precipitate that choice of alternatives he urgently wanted to bring about, could these two contingencies be fused and, in that case, force a final decision?

ii

Richard found Virginia waiting for him at Como station. She was neatly dressed in a well-cut tailor suit, neat felt hat and man's shirt and tie. To his surprise he noticed that, for the first time, she was not wearing leggings. Under her short, plain skirt her shapely calves displayed themselves in unfamiliar silk stockings, and well-made patent-leather shoes with low heels.

" How nice you look! "

" Mother said I was to dress up to see your father."

How like her, he thought, this method of conveying her mother's covering approval of her journey with him, and to shift on to the same shoulders acknowledgment of a directly flattering speech. To have frankly accepted ever so slight a

compliment regarding her appearance would, to her queer conception of herself, have implied coquetry.

Only on reaching Milan he observed that she had brought a bag with her. It was rather a cumbersome affair, he found, on lifting it from the rack.

" I'm going to stay the night with Louise."

Richard had never met her married sister, whose husband was a cavalry officer and in consequence frequently away with his regiment. He made no comment, but followed the porter who was carrying their two valises to the exit of the station. Arrived there, he stood in doubt a moment.

" I don't know whether I shall spend the night or not. It depends on my father. What d'you think? Shall I leave my bag *en depôt* here? "

Virginia did not think he had better do that. It wasn't like England; they might steal it or break it open. Why not leave it in the care of the Hotel Suisse opposite? He could always send or call for it.

He accepted the suggestion; the porter shouldered the luggage again, and they walked across the square.

While Richard was paying the porter Virginia gave instructions to the *concierge*, who disappeared, taking both their bags with him.

" I'm leaving mine too. I've got several things to do, and it would be in my way."

His father's train was due at twelve; it was not yet eleven, and he proposed accompanying her to her sister's.

" I'd like to make her acquaintance."

To his surprise she demurred to the suggestion. Her sister was " funny "; also she would not be prepared to receive a stranger without warning. She thought it better he should not go with her; besides, she had several commissions to do for her mother.

Accordingly he drove her to a sort of Milanese Whiteley's, where she told him to dismiss the cab, and produced a long list from her pocket.

" Good Lord! that will take all day."

" Naw, naw. But you can leave me."

Richard thought he would ; but how could he communicate with her after he had seen his father ?

She was evidently prepared for this emergency, for she took out of her pocket a letter-case—she was always methodical in her ways—and drew from it a carefully folded piece of paper.

" That's the number. Old Rizzo will answer if I'm not in the room. He's awfully deaf. Only say ' Virginia ' loud and he'll call me. What time will you ring up ? "

" Supposing we say after lunch, between two and three."

He left her to her shopping.

Walking aimlessly through the Galleria Umberto, he ran into Cesare Sismondo. He intended passing him by, but the youth greeted him affably and held out a podgy hand.

" You in Milan ? Come to lunch at Cova's. Dora Scotti, the actress, is lunching with me."

Richard declined, but the other detained him.

" Have you seen Brigita lately ? "

Richard nodded uncommunicatively.

" We're *brouillés*. I couldn't stand the way she treated me." His voice became confidential. " To say the truth, I was getting frightened anyhow."

Richard did not want to hear any more and walked on, but the youth was not to be thrown off.

" Too many lies," he continued. " Louise would have found it out when she came back, and there would have been trouble."

It revolted Richard to make use of this unpleasant creature, but he had to ask a question :

" Where is Louise ? "

" In Piedmont. She hasn't been here for months. Her husband's regiment is at grand manœuvres now. They won't be back till July. Brigita always came to my flat."

Richard had got his information.

" Good-day." Without more ado he walked away.

So Virginia's story about Louise was a pure invention. One more example of her endless duplicity. If she knew Louise was away she must also be in Brigita's confidence, and the two sisters had put their heads together to hoodwink

their mother while each carried on her separate intrigue. For, what else was his affair with Virginia but an intrigue, if regarded unequivocally? It had not been that at the start, but it had degenerated into it. Moreover, it had not even the flavour of romance or the justification of mutually avowed passion. Elinor's affairs were venial in comparison. Richard's self-esteem shrank at the realisation of his own weakness. He was going to introduce this girl to his father, knowing that her innocence was a sham by which the old man would certainly be duped, in order to secure means whereby his wife could be cast off and himself freed to take Virginia away with him. He was actually contemplating marriage with a girl capable of a deceit deeper than that of a courtesan. She was to be the mother of children by him. Was this a foundation upon which to rebuild his life?

iii

Richard was prepared to see his father looking ill, but not for what he saw when, walking along the platform peering into the compartments, he espied a little group at the door of one immediately ahead of him.

The guard was receiving packages handed from within, and Mr Kurt, with the aid of his servant, a decent-looking man of mature years, slowly and with evident difficulty descended just as Richard reached the spot. His father's beard had lost its reddish tinge; it was snow-white; his cheeks were sunken; his low collar looked much too large for him.

"How are you, Richard?"

At the sound of his voice, still with something of the old ring in it, at the sight of the shrunken figure trying to straighten itself, at the glance of the black eyes which yet evoked memory of their former fire, Richard sustained a grievous shock. He gave his father his arm, and they walked slowly towards the station entrance. Every now and then Mr Kurt stopped to cough, and, passing his stick to the hand within Richard's arm, he used the other to hold to his mouth a handkerchief into which with painful effort he spat the

mucus from his throat. He tried several times to speak, but had to give it up. He managed to bring out at last :

" I'm rather a wreck, I'm afraid."

Richard pressed his father's arm against his own side without answering. A motor-car awaited them. As he almost lifted him in, Richard noticed with a pang how light he was. Always a slight man, he had become a shadow. Once seated in the carriage, and after a moment's rest, the buoyancy his son knew so well asserted itself. He made a joking allusion to his condition :

" I can't smoke, that's the worst of it. A small cigar after a meal. What d'you think of that ? "

Richard expressed sympathy as best he could.

" How many cigarettes do you smoke a day ? " Mr Kurt looked at Richard as he asked this in his old piercing manner, but the eyes were glassy.

" About twenty."

" Not so bad, not so bad."

Richard was amazed at his father's equanimity. He always had been astonishingly resilient, and indifference to his own ailments was one of his marked characteristics.

Richard wanted to tell the man to drive to the hotel at once, but Mr Kurt would not let him.

" No, no. Why be so extravagant ? Scott will be here in a minute with the hand-luggage."

" I hope he's attentive ? "

" The best servant I ever had, but he wouldn't suit you."

The short laugh was smothered by another fit of coughing, through which, however, he contrived to convey an impression of smiling. When he had relieved himself he added : " He can't polish boots."

Richard accepted the chaffing allusion to his smartness with the best laugh he could muster.

" I don't care so much as I used to."

" Don't you ? "

Mr Kurt's eyes were directed to Richard's feet with a whimsical expression as Scott and a porter appeared.

He would not hear of lunching at the hotel.

" Bad and expensive. In Italy any little restaurant gives you eatable food."

" Won't it tire you too much ? "

" Not any more than the hotel. I expect I shall cough a bit."

His father's smile was the more pathetic because of its whimsicality.

After a wash, Mr Kurt proposed that they should walk—stroll, he called it—to the Galleria. He remembered a restaurant there which he had particularly liked years ago.

" I remember once," he remarked, as, leaning on Richard's arm, they slowly walked up the Via Veneto, " your poor mother and I lunched there." He stopped to cough. He had a light overcoat on his arm which, with his old independence, he had refused to let Richard carry when they started. Now, with the need for use of a handkerchief, it was too much for him, and his son quietly relieved him of it. " I can see her sitting there with me now outside, at a small table. It was on the left-hand side as you enter from the Scala. She so enjoyed watching the people, especially the opera-singers, strolling through. I should like to try and find it."

" I think I know which it is." Richard was thinking of his mother as she must have looked in those far-off days. But his concern for his father blotted out the picture ; the effort to talk while walking was so evidently beyond his powers.

They were passing Cova's and Mr Kurt immediately recalled it. " Ah ! Ristorante Cova, where I took her to tea. They made a delicious cake then, called—what was it called ? " He stood and looked in at the shop-window, in which were displayed all kinds of cakes and *bonbons*. He was breathing with difficulty and now leant heavily on his son's arm.

" Do you mean *panetone ?* They make it still," Richard said.

" That's the name—*panetone*. Do they really ? I should like to buy one. Freddy and Sissy will appreciate that—much better for them than sweets."

He was thinking of his grandchildren. They entered the shop, within which there was a kind of bar. A group of young

men were standing together drinking vermouth cocktails, talking and laughing loudly. One or two of them recognised Richard and nodded, looking at Mr Kurt with curiosity. Richard found a chair for his father.

" Who are they ? " the old man asked in a whisper.

" Some of the *jeunesse dorée* of Milan," his son whispered back.

" Beastly habit, the *apéritif*."

Richard noticed that his father's remark had been overheard and that one of the party was Sismondo, who sheepishly turned his back, making a remark in an undertone to his neighbour.

The *panetone* was duly purchased, as were several boxes of *marrons glacés*. It was a lifelong habit of Mr Kurt never to return home from his travels empty-handed.

" Olivia loves them. By the way, do you know you used to be a great one for sweets ? *Magnum bonum* jujubes were what you liked." Mr Kurt gave his short laugh. To Richard's relief, for once, it was not followed by a cough. " I got a big bill from a chemist ' account rendered.' It alarmed your poor mother. She thought it was for medicines, but it turned out to be *magnum bonums*."

Richard remembered the incident and also the indignant letter his father wrote him on the subject. It happened at his first school, when he was about ten, and was his first adventure in running up bills.

Mr Kurt rose with difficulty and they crossed the street. Richard held up his hand to stop a large red automobile which was bearing down on them. The driver, a young man showily dressed, shoved down his hand-brake with an angry expression. Richard could imagine he was cursing " the old fool " for getting in his way when he was late for lunch as it was.

They proceeded slowly through the arcade.

" That's the very place. It hasn't changed a bit. I remember it perfectly."

Mr Kurt pointed with his stick to a restaurant at the corner of two arcades. It was a well-known and much-frequented place, crowded now, as Richard could see, inside and out. Nobody troubled about them. The waiters were far too busy

flying about with orders and dishes to bother about an exhausted old man. Richard lifted his hat to a middle-aged man sitting alone at a small table, beside him an empty chair on which a diminutive dog lay curled up.

" Will you allow my father to use that chair until I can secure a table ? " he asked in his best Italian.

The man was reading the paper propped up in front of him against the *carafe.* Without answering or looking up, he seized the small animal and put it in his lap.

" Thank you very much." Richard pulled the chair towards his father.

Leaving him a moment, he passed inside and placed a five-franc piece in the hand of the restaurant-manager. With urbane alacrity this person set about finding a table. All those outside were occupied, but Richard knew his father wanted to lunch there and pressed the man to make room. Ignoring his " *Ma signore, e impossibile,*" he thrust another five francs into his palm. That settled it ; room had to be made somehow, and it was. Notwithstanding some muttered and some louder, protests from the disturbed occupants, their tables were moved closer and an extra one was produced from within and placed in an excellent position.

Mr Kurt bowed with ceremonious politeness to the gentleman with the dog, who, a little embarrassed when for the first time he looked up and saw that the outrage on his pet was comparatively justifiable, bowed back with some show of civility.

" Wonderful how polite they are in Latin countries," the old man remarked as he took his new seat. " So obliging too. Imagine them in England making room for two strangers like this."

Richard handed the menu-card to his father, who took out his spectacles and looked it carefully over.

" What d'you say to *risotto con tartuffi* with a *costeletta Milanese* to follow and a *fiasco* of Chianti ? "

" Excellent."

How far Mr Kurt's enjoyment of his lunch was due to a rekindling of old memories, a sort of temporary rejuvenescence Richard could not tell, but to his satisfaction his father

undoubtedly ate a good meal and was remarkably cheerful. He seemed determined to go on as he had always done. It was not a case of deluding himself or of making an effort for the sake of his son. He made no secret to Richard of his serious state of health, but he ignored it as far as his physical powers enabled him to, and this to Richard was as entirely characteristic as was his unstudied avoidance of any serious references. There was no possible opening for his son to express in ever so slight a way something of what was in his mind. It had always been so, and it would, Richard now realised, continue thus to the end. His father had always avoided anything in the nature of an exchange of thoughts. His hatred of coming to grips with that in life which could not be weighed or measured in material terms had become so much a part of him that his self-expression was atrophied. Whatever he felt, he could only sense it physically. Emotions which had their source in spiritual experience were beyond his grasp.

When the coffee was brought Mr Kurt touched his son's arm.

" What cigarettes do you smoke ? "

Richard handed him his cigarette-case.

" I've taken to these cheap Italian things. They're not up to much."

His father selected one and examined it.

" Ah ! I know them. Macedonias. I used to like them for a change."

Putting it in his mouth, he struck a match, offered a light to Richard and lit his own. But the first whiff he inhaled brought on, as his son feared, a violent fit of coughing which lasted some minutes.

" I'm afraid," he managed to get out, " that's my last cigarette." He looked at it ruefully a second, then produced a cigar. " I can't inhale, that's the worst of it," he continued, putting off the end.

He did not light it at once, to the relief of Richard, who threw his own cigarette away.

" No, no. Smoke, my boy, smoke. It doesn't hurt me. I never minded other people being able to do things I could

not do myself. D'you know"—he again touched his son's arm and spoke still lower—" I've had to give up the rooms. They gave me up at last."

The reference to his old passion stirred Richard. He knew what the deprivation implied.

" I often think of that wonderful stroke of luck of yours. How long was that ago ? "

" About eight years, I think."

" Was it ? Eight years ! Um ! Well, that's all over for me. Your uncle always said the rooms would kill me. Anyhow I shall have died fighting. D'you know"—he looked round to see that he was not overheard—" my last bout was the best I ever had. *Huit-onze* five times running, and I played maximums on all the chances—after that I had a go at *trente-et-quarante* and—well, it was a very good finish, very good."

Richard did his best to be sympathetic.

" I'm unregenerate, I'm afraid, Richard ; an old sinner. I only hope my example will cure you."

" I don't think I ever shall gamble again. I don't really like gambling."

Mr Kurt looked at his son with an expression that was almost wistful.

" I'm glad you don't, my boy. It's like opium, just like opium."

The old gentleman signed to the waiter to bring the bill and looked it over carefully.

" Very moderate. Twelve francs fifty, and one franc fifty for the waiter. That's less than twelve and six for a meal that you couldn't get in London. You're lucky to live in Italy."

Richard repressed a smile. He did not think so now.

Mr Kurt took his son's arm and they paced slowly on through the arcade.

" There used to be a shop outside the *galleria* opposite the Duomo where they sold silver things, hand-carved ; very nice things they made. I should like to go there."

They found the place. It was a jeweller's and silversmith's concern, and Richard's taste, trained to the antique, found

little to admire in the work of, as the assistant assured them, the best Italian artists. A silver statuette of a horse appeared especially to strike Mr Kurt's fancy.

" Very well made," he commented, " very well made. How much is it ? "

The man named what Richard thought a preposterous figure. For the amount named he could have bought a really fine example of Empire silver. His father had never cared for horses either. What could he see in this commonplace reproduction ? But he did not attempt to disparage the object when Mr Kurt asked him what he thought of it.

" It certainly is a good model of a thoroughbred horse."

" Well, you must know. You used to be fond of horses. By the way, Dick "—Richard could not recall his father having used the familiar nickname since he was a child—" I don't think I ever saw any of those horses you bred." He smiled again whimsically, then turned to the shopman : " Pack it up."

The parcel was handed to Richard. It was quite heavy and, having his father to think of, he was about to suggest that it might just as well be sent to the hotel, when Mr Kurt said :

" You're to keep that as a little souvenir of our meeting."

Deeply touched, Richard patted the old man's hand as it lay on his arm.

" Thanks. Thanks very much. I shall treasure it."

The last time he had received a spontaneous present of that kind from his father was on his eighteenth birthday.

" I think I must take a cab and get back to the hotel now. I dare say you can find something to do while I rest."

" You needn't bother about me, governor. I only want to be with you." He answered as he felt.

iv

It was only after they had driven back to the hotel, and Mr Kurt had retired to his room, that Richard suddenly remembered his promise to telephone to Virginia. The girl had gone

clean out of his head. He looked at his watch ; it was past four. They must have sat a long time over their coffee. Wondering what she must be thinking, he went to the telephone. A feeble voice answered, and though he shouted " Virginia " into the receiver, as she had instructed him, he could elicit no distinguishable response. He went to the door, and calling a taxi from the rank, told the man to drive to the palazzo Peraldi. It was a huge building, with an archway entrance large enough to admit vehicles of any size to the square courtyard round the four sides of which it was built. In the lodge of the *concierge* he found an old man who, in answer to his inquiry for Virginia, showed no interest whatever. " *Primo piano destra,*" he emitted in a mechanical tone when he heard the name, without looking up. Richard mounted the great staircase. The balustrade was carved in an ornate manner ; there were heavy gilded chandeliers at each turn, and the wide steps were dirty and had been freely used for expectoration. Richard tried the electric bell without result, but, in answer to his repeated thump of the bronze knocker, a venerable person, wearing spectacles on an immense hooked nose above a long, white, goat-like beard, opened the door, bowing low and putting his hand behind his ear to catch the visitor's name. Finally he appeared to understand, and showed Richard into an enormous saloon. The walls were covered with pictures by inferior Italian masters of past epochs, and in the centre an irregular and shapeless mass covered with discoloured sheets gave the gruesome impression of an island of the dead. Richard tried to explain that he had been unable to telephone to Virginia, but gave up the hopeless attempt. " Donna Virginia " had gone out ; the old man did not know where, or when she would be back. Would the *egregio signore* wait ? Perhaps he would be more comfortable in the *cassa*. Richard was wondering what to reply when an elderly woman of bright appearance entered the room. She greeted Richard with a look of understanding, and, pointing to her ear, uttered some words of patois of which he only understood " Signor Rizzo." Approaching the old gentleman, she shouted some more unintelligible sentences into his ear and half led, half pushed,

him out of the room. Signing to Richard to follow her, she preceded him along a lofty, wide corridor, and, throwing open a door, ushered him into a chamber scantily furnished like a sitting-room used as a bedroom.

"*La signorina verra fra poco,*" she shouted, either under the impression that he would understand better if only she spoke loud enough or from her association with "old Rizzo."

"*Il signore vuole caffe?*" she asked.

Richard did not, but he lit a cigarette and sat down; whereupon she nodded to him in a friendly fashion and departed.

There was no sign of Virginia's belongings in the room. A huge four-poster bed with dusty-looking crimson damask curtains stood against one wall and had been prepared to sleep in. Upon a table standing on high inlaid legs and covered with a plush tablecloth washing utensils had been placed. Richard thought it one of the most depressing rooms he had ever been in. He got up and stood by the window, which looked out on the courtyard. He had not finished his cigarette when Virginia rushed into the room, breathless.

"Why didn't you telephone?"

Richard had no excuse ready, nor did he try to think of one.

"I clean forgot. My father being so ill put everything out of my head. I telephoned afterwards but I couldn't understand a word. So I came on here."

"Where is your father now?"

"He's resting. I'm going to see him again, but he doesn't expect me to stay the night. I could meet you after dinner and take you back to Como. It will be rather late though."

"Oh, never mind about me. It's your poor old father. You ought to stop and see him off to-morrow."

"I don't think he'd like me to. He's very independent, will be till the end. He's got a very attentive servant."

Virginia looked shocked.

"A servant! But you're his son. That's better than a servant."

Richard pondered a moment.

" I'll think about it. Perhaps I will stop. But what about you? "

" I'm all right. Louise is away, so I shall stay here. It's all ready for me. And Caterina comes back in the morning early and she'll give me breakfast. We can meet at the train."

The matter-of-fact way in which she accepted her sister's absence disarmed Richard for the moment. His mind was preoccupied with his father.

" About your seeing my father," he began. " I'm afraid ——— "

" I know," she interrupted. " He's too ill. But give him my love and tell him how sorry I am."

" I can't do that unless I tell him all about you. He doesn't even know you're here. He wouldn't understand."

" It doesn't matter, then, but you must stay and take care of him."

" You mean," Richard looked at her keenly, " I ought to remain with him, stop at his hotel, and all that? "

" If he wants you to, of course, but you said he was—I forget the word."

" Independent. He certainly is. He's never been accustomed to having me dancing attendance upon him. It would fidget him."

" Oh, then, don't do it. But you must see him off. It would be unkind not to. He only wants to save you trouble."

Richard made up his mind.

" All right. I will. I'll stop at that hotel near the station. But what will you do about dinner? "

" Dinner? " She laughed as though the idea was absurd. " Caterina will make me some coffee and I shall get a *panetone.*"

" Let's go and get it now."

She acquiesced, and, calling Caterina, gave her some instructions in a few rapid sentences.

He wanted to go to Cova's but she objected. There were too many grand people there and she knew a better place. They debated where and how to meet.

" My father said he'd have a light, early dinner. I'm to

be at the hotel at half-past six. He's sure not to stop up long. I could meet you at half-past nine. Supposing I come to your house ? "

" Naw, not there. The *concierge* would see you come in and he might think it funny."

" Shall we say at the Hotel Suisse then ? "

" All right."

They had reached her shop. The *panetone* was purchased ; but Richard had noticed a dairy on the way and, retracing their steps, he went in and bought a quart of cream and some new-laid eggs. A little farther on he secured a basket of Alpine strawberries.

" It will be like the *latteria*. I wish I had those dear little children to eat all this with me."

They carried the parcels between them, and Richard took leave of her outside the palazzo Peraldi. He observed that the *concierge*, as before, paid not the slightest attention as she entered.

v

Richard thought his father looked exhausted when he went up to his room to fetch him for dinner. So much so that he suggested their having the meal upstairs, but Mr Kurt resolutely declined.

" Dine in my bedroom ! Not till I'm on my last legs," was his reply.

It never occurred to him that he ought to have a sitting-room. So far from that, he had taken an ordinary single bedroom, with another smaller one for his servant across the passage.

" He ought to be in an adjoining room."

" That's what the hotel people said when they tried to put me into one of their grand apartments. That was all very well in your dear mother's day. I don't need such luxury."

He was struggling with his shoes, his man standing by uneasily. For Mr Kurt had never yet allowed a servant to do such things for him, partly because he detested self-indulgence, but also, Richard knew, feeling the same himself,

because the implied servility of the act offended his own sense of virility. Richard insisted on helping him ; it was indeed necessary, for his father began to cough violently with the effort. Mr Kurt had dressed for the evening, as he had done all his life. Richard smelt the familiar mouth-wash, the equally familiar *eau-de-Cologne* on the large, fine handkerchiefs, two of which Mr Kurt had always carried, so that he should never be without a clean one. He put each in its respective pocket and made a joking remark about having to treble his daily allowance of them. The lift was at the other end of the corridor and Richard sent Scott on to ring for it. Mr Kurt had to stop three times on the way to cough. Richard's heart misgave him. How long could an old man in such a state last ? He marvelled at what one could only call his stoicism, but dreaded the actual pain he feared must be in store for his father before the end.

Their dinner was brief. The restaurant was fairly full, and Richard bowed to the Folignos, who were with a party at a table in one corner. Mr Kurt wanted to know who they were, and, chiefly to save him from talking, Richard gave an account of Mrs Rafferty's fête the previous summer.

" Mrs Rafferty ? Let me see." Mr Kurt was trying to place the name. " Your mother used to know her. I think she met her at Nauheim. A handsome woman with a very weak heart."

He was quite interested in his son's description of the great event, but Richard avoided mentioning Elinor's share in it. His wife's name had not been mentioned by either of them, but something in connection with Mrs Rafferty's party must have reminded Mr Kurt of her.

" I hope Elinor didn't mind your coming to see me."

" No. She quite understood."

" Is she happy on the lake ? "

" As happy as she can be anywhere."

Mr Kurt did not pursue the subject, but afterwards, when they had left the dining-room and found a corner in the lounge hall, where coffee was brought, he suddenly put to Richard an embarrassing question :

" Are you happy yourself at last ? "

What was he to say? It was an opening if he wanted to make use of it. Perhaps the last one he would ever have. He looked gravely at his father, who had directed his eyes in the old keen way upon him when he asked the question, but had immediately withdrawn them. What was the use of telling him now what could in any case amount only to a small part of the story? It was too late. His father was too ill. Rather let him think that things were going on as they always had, neither better nor worse. Besides, Richard wanted to spare Elinor, and, if he once began to discuss his situation, it would be impossible to stop half-way. He would only be giving a false impression if he exonerated her at his own expense by telling his father of his affair with Virginia, and making out that he sought freedom from Elinor to marry the other. These thoughts flashed through his mind as he paused.

"I don't think happiness is ever continuous, governor. I'm happy at times—at least, almost happy."

"You're a queer fish, Richard. You puzzle me. What is it you want?"

"I don't think I can tell you that. I don't know exactly myself."

"But I thought from the way you wrote that you were delighted with your life on the lake. You said the villa was perfect and that you had charming friends."

There was uneasiness, almost a querulous note, in Mr Kurt's voice, and Richard was concerned to soothe him.

"Governor, please don't misunderstand. It's not anything more of that kind I want. I can't thank you enough for all you've done. I'm afraid I've been fearfully extravagant."

Mr Kurt's expression showed a certain relief.

"I can't say it was exactly cheap. Is it all paid?"

For an instant Richard hesitated between two conflicting influences. He wanted to be straightforward with his father and he wanted to spare him anxiety on his account. He knew Mr Kurt would give him the money he required and that this would make all the difference in his present situation, but it went terribly against the grain to allow such considerations

to intrude during their meeting. He wanted to keep this unique experience clear from the taint of money. It was the only time in their two lives that father and son had spent some hours alone together with, Richard felt, entire satisfaction to both. He made up his mind and answered firmly :

" Yes."

" Are you sure, Richard ? " He scanned Richard's face again.

" As sure as I can be, governor. Please don't bother yourself. I'm perfectly comfortable about that sort of thing."

Mr Kurt smiled wryly.

" You always were, you know, for a time."

Richard was distressed. Why couldn't his father simply say that, if there were anything owing, he could apply to his junior partner, who had always been his intermediary in such matters ? Why did he still worry himself about what, relatively speaking, were trifles ?

" I can manage with what I've got. Please don't think about it."

" Very well, my boy. I'll take your word for it."

Nothing more was said on the subject. Richard managed to introduce other topics, and soon afterwards his father said he would go to bed.

" Not to sleep, though, I'm afraid," he added with his characteristic smile.

They parted almost immediately after Richard got him to his room. Mr Kurt would not hear of his son seeing him off the next morning. The train left at eight, he said, and there was no object in Richard's putting himself out. He would be all right.

" Good-bye then, governor. I have loved seeing you."

" Good-bye, my boy. Make the best of things."

Richard lingered a moment ; he felt again the old shyness. He longed to say something, he did not know what, a tender word, anything almost. The farewell was so inadequate. His father was sitting on a chair tugging at his shoes. Once more Richard went down on his knees and pulled them off.

Getting up, he put his arm on the old man's shoulder and kissed him on the cheek. Then he went softly out of the room.

vi

Richard found Virginia waiting for him at the Hotel Suisse. She was sitting in a corner of the hall looking at a picture paper, and, as he came to her, drew his attention to some photographs of Italian cavalry performing wonderful feats of horsemanship at the manœuvres.

" Could you do that ? " she asked like a child.

Richard, fresh from parting with his father, was not in the mood to respond, but the picture made him think of something he wanted to find out.

" I don't know. It's only playing to the gallery. I want a drink."

He rang for a waiter and ordered whisky, but changed his mind and told him to bring the wine list. He hated spirits.

" How was poor Mr Kurt ? "

" Bad, I'm afraid. I hated leaving him, but he didn't want me to see him off. What d'you say to our taking a late train ? "

" Naw. I shall go back to Via Grimaldi. Caterina would be frightened if she didn't find me in the morning, and I promised old Rizzo to take some papers back to mother, and he's going to give them to me to-morrow."

Richard reflected.

" What about Louise ? " he asked suddenly.

" She's gone to Aspro in Piedmont with Giulio. I never thought of the manuœvres going on."

" Has she been gone long ? " The question was asked in a purposely careless tone.

" I don't know exactly when she went."

They were interrupted by the arrival of the waiter with the wine list. Richard ordered a bottle of champagne. He felt unnerved and in need of stimulant ; he was still under the influence of the emotion his father's condition had aroused in him.

She began questioning him about what had happened during the day. Richard told her about the silver horse ; he had left it in the care of the *concierge* when he came in. She begged him to show it her, but just then the waiter returned with the champagne.

" All right. But let me have a drink first. You must have some too."

She shook her head, but he prevailed on her to take half a glass, to which she added water. He emptied his and poured out another. The wine revived him ; his exhaustion made him feel its effect immediately.

" By the way, I saw that beast Sismondo to-day. He told me he and Brigita had quarrelled."

For an instant her expression betrayed that she was startled, but as quickly it changed to her habitual look of *naïveté*.

" What did he mean ? "

" He said Louise had been away a long time—all the spring, in fact. It looks rather queer, doesn't it ? "

" Why ? "

" About Brigita and him."

She hesitated a moment, then said :

" I don't know anything about it. Brigita never told me Louise was away. She often goes away and comes back again. Mother thought so."

" Thought what ? "

" That she was here."

Richard did not care to go into the matter any further. Anyhow he would be unable to penetrate to the truth. She was adept at evasiveness.

" It's no concern of mine, but I thought I'd tell you what that young cad said."

" Cesare tells stories when he's angry. Perhaps it isn't true about Louise. I'll find out and tell you."

Richard drained his glass and refilled it.

" I don't care. Brigita is quite capable of managing her own affairs. But I've something to say to you. Virginia, will you decide now, to-night ? "

" Decide ? " she repeated, as though she didn't understand.

" Yes. Decide to come away now—at once. We're here ; we've got a change of things. We can clear out by the first train to London."

" What would your poor old father say ? "

" We should meet in London. I'd explain everything. He'd see me through, and we could go clean away."

For a minute she seemed to be thinking it over.

" Did you tell him anything ? "

" Nothing about you. What would be the use till you made up your mind ? "

" But you said you would have to arrange something for your wife."

" I could do that afterwards, in London."

She was silent again for a moment.

" I couldn't. Not like that. I should be frightened."

" Frightened of what ? "

" To make your poor father unhappy. Perhaps it would kill him, then I should have done a wicked thing."

" You needn't fear that. He might disapprove, that's all."

" Then it would be wrong. I thought you said to go because it would be right and to make you happy."

" It wouldn't be right in a worldly sense, of course, but it would be right from my point of view. That is—if you care enough for me to make the sacrifice."

" It isn't that. I don't care for myself if it would make you happy. But I can't go like that now. I must think. How could I leave mother—like that—and Boso ? She'd have him killed."

Richard gulped down another glass of champagne. His blood began to tingle in his veins, his head felt hot, his reasoning power was in abeyance.

" All right. I shan't say any more. I can't make you come."

She put her hand on one of his, but the gesture was hesitating.

" Don't be angry with me. I'll do anything else you like."

His heart gave a jump.

" Do you mean that—anything ? " His pulses throbbed.

" Yes. I always want to please you."

" I know all that. But will you show you love me? Will you belong to me altogether? " His voice trembled with emotion.

" I don't know what you mean."

" You've never said you loved me. You've never kissed me." He seized her hand, pressing it hard, and fixed his eyes on hers. " You know what I mean? "

She looked round. One or two people were moving about the hall on their way to their rooms. At a table some feet away an elderly woman sat drinking a lemon squash and staring at them. Virginia pulled her hand away and looked solemn.

" How can I when you're married? It would be wicked."

He finished his wine—there was no more in the bottle—and rose to his feet.

" Well, I shan't say any more. I'll see you home."

She began fumbling in her pockets, first in one, then in the other. She pulled various things out, laid them on the table and put them back again—two small folded handkerchiefs, a ring with two little keys on it, her letter-case, a purse.

" I've lost it," she whispered.

" Lost what? "

" My latch-key."

For an instant Richard did not realise the significance of her remark. Then it flashed into his brain.

" You'll have to spend the night here, that's all." He tried to master himself and speak quietly.

" Yes. I hope they've got a room. I'll go and see."

Her tone was perfectly matter-of-fact, and she walked across to the bureau to inquire, leaving him standing there, looking dazed.

She came back at once.

" There's only a suite left, but they'll let me have the small room. I'll have my bag taken up now."

She crossed the hall to where the *concierge* sat behind his desk, and, giving him an order, returned to Richard.

" I'd better say good-night now."

He put his hand inside her arm above the elbow, pressing

it spasmodically, and walked with her to the lift, where a porter stood with her bag.

" I'll come up with you."

The man showed her the room, which was the smaller of two adjoining each other in a small self-contained apartment with a private bathroom and entrance.

" Take the bigger one. It's much nicer. This one will do for me." He turned to the man and gave him a couple of francs. " Bring my bag up, will you, and tell the people at the office."

He spoke now with complete self-control and confidence. The man disappeared on his errand. Virginia took possession of the larger room without more ado and turned to him with her barking laugh.

" Now you must show me the horse."

A quarter of an hour later, Richard went downstairs for a final drink. Before leaving Virginia he showed her the silver horse, which she greatly admired. She did not make the slightest allusion to his decision to remain the night, and apparently took for granted his occupying the next room to hers. She went about her preparations for the night while he was still in the room in a systematic, orderly way, and when he bade her good-night he heard her lock the door.

He called for another pint of champagne and drank one glass after another till it was finished. Its only effect was to make his pulses throb more wildly. His brain was perfectly clear. He informed the clerk at the office that he would be leaving the next morning, and inquired of the *concierge* quite deliberately how the trains ran. He judged he had been downstairs over half-an-hour. He had made up his mind to a course of action if his anticipations were confirmed when he went upstairs. He proceeded leisurely to the lift and, reaching the suite, went within and locked the outer door which led into the corridor. His first action on reaching his room was to try the door between Virginia's room and his. It was still locked. He went into the little passage which led to the bathroom past her outer door. This was slightly ajar. Back in his room, he threw off his clothes and without an instant's hesitation, without troubling to avoid noise, he

walked back into the passage, opened her door boldly and switched on the electric light.

She lay on the bed apparently fast asleep. The bed-clothes had been thrown back, and she was clad in pyjamas. Her head rested on her arm, her face being turned away from his as he stood over her, listening to her regular breathing.

At dawn he left her. She had never opened her eyes throughout that delirious night. Now she lay motionless, her tangle of bronze hair deep sunk in the pillow he had placed beneath her head before leaving her. Just once he looked back, then went into his room. He needed what sleep he could still get. His heavy eyes fell on a piece of paper pinned to his pillow. On it, written in her clear, childish writing, were these words : " After you went downstairs I found the latch-key. So I shall go away early or Caterina will be frightened. I'll meet you at the station if you telephone what time." He folded the note up and put it in his pocket-book.

At seven he woke. He jumped up and went into her room. It was empty. All evidences of the room having been used had been obliterated. The crumpled pillows had been shaken, the bed made, the washstand and its utensils cleansed, the used towels hung in their place.

With a violent movement he tore back the bed-clothes and scattered them partly on, partly off the bed. He hurled the pillows about anyhow and cast the towels on the floor. The jug had been refilled with fresh water. He poured some into the basin and made great splashes on the stand and on the carpet. Then, raging, he went back into his room.

The passionate moment passed. To it succeeded a deadly feeling of disgust, of repugnance, of loathing. It overwhelmed him, like a moral nausea as irresistible as sea-sickness.

He shaved and dressed himself feverishly, then hastily threw his things into his valise.

A single thought was in his mind, a thought that shaped itself into a resolve increasing in strength with every minute

that passed. He would never go back to the lake. Never again should that girl get hold of him, never. He would endure anything now rather than go on in the same way. His manhood demanded this of him, the call was urgent. He had given her every chance ; she had preferred this brazen deceit, this damnable pretence of innocence. After such a night as that, could he meet her again as though nothing had happened ? Could he start afresh, seeing her daily with that cursed lie in their hearts, that bond of a mutual degradation ? Could he act a part, day after day, and be enthralled again, dominated by a desire that throttled, by a mere physical impulse that had not even a name ? Could they go on befouling truth and masquerading as playfellows ; getting up and going to bed with falsehood ; eating it, drinking it, wallowing in it !

No ; any life would be better than this hideous sham.

What else might happen he did not care, he must set himself free from this. He would leave the lake now and for ever.

He ran downstairs with his bag in his hand. He had just time for a cup of coffee.

When he reached the platform his father was being helped into the train. Richard jumped into the compartment after him.

POSTSCRIPT

POSTSCRIPT

It is strange that when things go very badly with me, my steps turn towards Lowndes Square. Aunt Kate, her personality, her life and her children have nothing in common with me. And yet this very contradiction draws me in that direction. The stability, the respectability of such lives, the qualities antithetic to my own which make them what they are, the complacent finality of their attitude to everything under the sun, their sureness that things are naturally and obviously so and can't be otherwise for decent people, have a soothing effect upon me for a short time.

The attraction must be a compound of sentiment and association. I persist in cherishing the notion of Uncle Theo's highmindedness and endow Aunt Kate with a dim reflexion of it. I must have some atavistic bias towards respectability, an unconscious nostalgia for contact with remote ancestral virtues. Uncle Theo was, I suppose, the highest minded of the three brothers, according to the accepted code of the right-minded citizen. My father so stood out from the others, was so superior to them in intellectual grasp, in knowledge of the world and in personal charm that I have difficulty in applying the same standard to him as to Uncle Theo who was the most honourable as Uncle Fred is the least, as he was kindlier, more benevolent than Uncle Fred is now, whatever he may have been at the beginning. And yet Uncle Fred in his meanest moments, when I come near hating him, has a glowing intensity, an uncompromising self-sufficiency that force my admiration. Uncle Fred is in fact non-moral whereas Uncle Theo was essentially moral; his ideal was respectability. And by a strange irony it was he who at various moments of crisis in my life stood in the breach. I see his stout respectable figure in a pugilistic attitude defending the devil (me) from Fate, whose retributions his worthy con-

science nevertheless fully approves. I think of him as I walk across the Park. How heartily he would have disapproved of everything I have done, am doing and am likely to do. Each stage in my walk marks a stage backwards into the past. At the bridge over the Serpentine I've got back to my marriage and Uncle Theo's cable to Dr. Flössheim. I time it nicely. My hand and my memory reach together the bronze knocker I brought back from Italy, nominally as a present to him, actually the memorial of a night nearly thirty years ago when a small frightened boy rang the bell I am ringing now and got the answer that turned him back, a forlorn figure, into the foggy street. Alone then. Alone now.

Poor old Uncle Theo—died an imbecile muttering "We shall all end in the gutter—in the gutter"—softening of the brain. "One of your aunt's days at home!" he used to exclaim with a grimace on such occasions as this.

Room full of rubbish, salad of bad pictures and worthless ornaments. Aunt Kate sitting in a corner of sofa behind loaded tea-table, island of teacups surrounded by chairs, a couple of girl cousins—general effect of brotherliness in the Lord plus American brand of amiability—curious hybrid accent, London and Nashville. Inchoate acquaintances, solidly respectable, dull joyfulness about nothing. Sad-faced woman of forty seems to know me, soft-voiced, long thin fingers, silvery hair arranged in careful American coiffure.

"Why Richard! What a surprise! You remember Sadie McFall, our old friend from Nashville?"

"How d'you do, Miss McFall? Yes, of course, of course——"

I shake hands with the sad-faced woman. I remember nothing.

"Mr Richard has forgotten me, Katie."

I gaze at her, vaguely enquiring with my eyes. There's something sympathetic in the worn face, in the dark, silvery hair, in the soft southern voice.

"Have you forgotten Anna and Mary Lee Clare?"

Anna and Mary Lee? Ah! Anna Clare. She had golden hair. Mary Lee's was dark. Jack Spurr in love with Mary Lee. He sang "White wings, they never grow weary," falsetto. Anna Clare was beautiful but I did not fall in love

with her. She was too statuesque to fall in love with. I couldn't have borne to be alone with her. I should have been afraid to touch her. Their house was opposite the Capitol. There were steps leading up to it where the darkies sat in the moonlight and sang " Carry me back to ole Tennessee."

" Yes, Miss McFall. I remember Anna and Mary Lee."

" And Emma Joe ? "

" Emma Joe ? Emma Joe ? "

Flash ! Yes, I remember Emma Joe. I heard her footstep. She bent over and kissed me. The room was darkened. Very hot outside, curtains drawn during heat of day. I pretended I was asleep. Did she really know I was awake and kiss me on purpose ? Emma Joe was very pretty. But it never went any further. What a fool of a boy I was. I drove her to the races in a hired drag with two horses. I drove her into the country, we two alone, in a one-horse buggy. We drove back again and I never even kissed her. I went away and she wrote me letters in a thin long pointed writing. I was very miserable because I was in love with Emma Joe. I never saw her again. I went back to England and then I heard she was married to a plumber. To a plumber !—and I never kissed her.

" Yes, Miss McFall. I remember Emma Joe."

Other people came into the drawing-room, the sort of people Aunt Kate seems to know endless numbers of. I've never met them anywhere else. Tea is served. My girl cousins begin bantering me in a peculiar uncle-Theo-like way which is supposed to be funny. I keep my seat near Sadie McFall without saying a word until she gets up.

" I must go and leave some cards, good-bye Katie, honey."

I accompany her. Downstairs she asks : " Do you know a Mrs Vendramin by any chance ? I have an introduction to her from the pianist Cadajos."

" I know Miss Vendramin slightly."

We walk across the Park. Sadie McFall is a singer of southern negro songs, is having some success in drawing-rooms. I want to remember her because she seems to feel my mood, doesn't plague me with American chatter.

" Let me be frank. I don't recall, could you remind me ? "

" The old Jackson home. Johnny McClure's party—the old darkie with the big jug of mint julep—that great liar Mac and the quails he said he'd shot. Saint Louis afterwards. Jessie and me together."

I stare at her. St. Louis? Jessie? Gone, quite gone.

We two odd companions walk on. I've nothing more to say to her. Let the dead past bury itself again. Will Myrtle Vendramin be there?

" Are you going in or only leaving cards? " I ask her as we approach the house.

" I should like to go in if they're at home. Cadajos told me they are always pleased to see musical people. I shan't sing my negro songs to them, they're trash to real musicians."

I want to see Myrtle Vendramin again very much. She talked little. I asked her questions about herself. Ada said she'd known her for years but the girl said she hardly knew Ada. Both true doubtless. There's something intensely sympathetic about Myrtle Vendramin. When a man is to pieces like me he feels people who are sympathetic. They're rare. Life is hell, bloody hell, nothing but hell. I forgot life during those few hours near Myrtle Vendramin. Perhaps she won't even be there and if she is I may not be able to speak to her. I shan't forget everything by just looking at her. I'm not in love. In love, God Almighty! But I'm going to see her again if I can. Probably it's only an idea that she's anything special. Ada said she was a sweet girl. I dare say. I used to know one or two. Don't know any now, don't want to. We're on the doorstep.

As I ring the bell " I've only met Miss Vendramin once, you know—at the Opera, with her sister. I was there with mine and she introduced me."

" Cadajos told me she was charming."

Charming, sweet. If she's only that—— Anyhow, what does it matter? What use can she be to me? What about Elinor? What about everything?

Friendly butler. Old-fashioned house. Up a wide staircase. Butler stands before closed doors; a woman is singing. We stand, listening.

" A lovely voice," Sadie McFall whispers, " lovely ! " The doors are thrown open. The older lady must be Mrs Vendramin. Her daughter comes forward with her. Brilliant appearance. People sitting about the room. Shake hands with a white-bearded old gentleman, Mr Vendramin. That's Bertola sitting at the piano.

" How d'you do, Signor Bertola ? "

He looks as if he doesn't recognise me. Then " Ah ! " and throws his head back. Gets up, lights half-smoked cigar, puts it in wooden holder, lays his hand on my arm and draws me to other side of room. I suddenly like Bertola. Nodded to him for years but hardly know him. He stands in front of me with his left hand in his jacket pocket, right holding cigar to his mouth. He has grey-blue prominent eyes and wavy white hair, lots of it. Wish I had as much. Rosy cheeks, short white beard, fattish. Full of life. Dear little man.

" It was at Claridge's they played that Neapolitan song of yours and you told me no one could sing it as Miss Myrtle Vendramin does."

" No one sings my songs like her. *Elle n'a pas de voix mais elle chante*," he pokes his cigar into the corner of his mouth, " *à la perfection*." Myrtle Vendramin is beside him as he says that. There is dignity in this short, square figure. He conveys to me a deep caring about this singing of hers. I feel that, in spite of not understanding how one can sing to perfection without a voice. This, of course, must be a singing master's figure of speech. She says some words to him in a low tone. I see the emotion passing slowly, leaving tears in his grey-blue globular eyes. He lays his arm familiarly within hers, his old faded eyes smiling into her young rich brown ones with a rare and speaking fondness. Her eyes turn on me and sweep me in with him and her, their firm restfulness includes me in their little special moment of joy. I feel the inclusion with a queer, unaccustomed sense of instant happiness. I am conscious of being privileged. She holds me with her in that sense of privilege as though it were her will I should feel it then at once, if never again, as though this instant immensely matters, as though, it seems to me, I am on the threshold of an unknown happiness she wants to

make known to me. And I had heard but the last bar of that song behind closed doors. Would she sing again? "Will you?" I ask. Her eyes answer. Bertola walks to the great piano placed between the windows of the wide old-fashioned room with its balcony to the old square. She stands a moment beside me still. We don't speak. I can't look into her eyes, I feel them following mine round the room. Large Victorian pictures in heavy gilt, the portrait of a golden-haired lady on one wall, can only be Mrs Vendramin when young, numbers of signed photographs, some with bars of music, evidently musical celebrities. Bertola plays a few chords. There is a sudden hush. I drift into the background, choosing a seat alone near the door. She stands directly facing me, she is looking straight at me. Bertola plays the opening bars, and she smiles towards the old gentleman sitting on the sofa beyond me to the right. His profile is outlined against the dullness of further wall, a strong determined patriarchal face, high bold forehead, white hair still with a tinge of darkness curling behind the ears, attitude speaks pride, possession, dignity, softened to her by the love his gaze tells of. I have never seen an old face with so much love in it. It is an Italian song she is singing, it must be an old song. The words come distinctly to me but convey no meaning. Meaning doesn't seem to matter. Bertola says she has no voice. Maybe. It's the sort of voice I love, a voice that enters into me. She sings with great ease, without the usual pretentious affectation of performers and yet ignorant as I am of music, of singing, I feel that she does it exactly right, that the song is what she makes it, neither more nor less. Her attitute is perfectly natural, she sings as though the words came of themselves. The song lasts only a moment. I am trying to capture and hold it before it dies away. The emotion it has roused refuses to die with it. The applause startles me, I clap my hands mechanically. Sadie McFall goes towards her, ecstatic words reach and irritate me. When a thing is perfect what is the use of saying "divine," "lovely"? The words lower the experience to the level of a performance. This was not a performance, it was the utterance of some beauty within the girl, a beauty old Bertola

knows all about. I look at the white-bearded father. He is lying back against the sofa with his eyes on her still. Sadie McFall is going, she is saying good-bye. I suppose I ought to leave with her but I don't intend to. I want to talk to Myrtle Vendramin if I get the chance. She's coming towards me. We sit down at the far side of the room under her mother's portrait.

" It's no use my paying you compliments. It was a great privilege."

" I'm glad you liked it."

" It wasn't liking. It was a sort of vision."

She doesn't answer. Her eyes seem to be leading me on, seem to be wanting to help me to express myself.

" I never hear any music. I didn't think I cared about it much. Your singing is a revelation. But it isn't only the singing."

I don't look at her as I speak. I feel her eyes on me and can't face them. A struggle is going on within me. I want to say a great deal. There's a hum of conversation. There should be time to say something. What's the most important thing to say ?

" I suppose I felt your singing like that because I'm down and out, quite down and out."

Now I can look at her. She would be called a fashionable figure, elegant, distinguished. The brilliant case is a part of her but I'm not talking to that part. I'm talking to her eyes, not to her silky, well-arranged hair, not to her fresh, cool skin, not to her delicate dark eyebrows, not to her shapely hands, I'm talking to something behind her eyes.

" Why do you say you're down and out ? "

" Because I want to tell you the truth immediately. I may not have time to tell you anything else and I don't suppose I shall see you again."

" Why ? Are you going away ? "

" Yes. I'm going away."

" By yourself ? "

" Yes. By myself."

" Will that help you ? "

" I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think anything

can help me. I'm past help. But I won't go on talking like this. I'm not ashamed but I don't want to bore you."

" You don't bore me. Why do you say you're past help ? "

" Because the whole concern—my whole life—has gone wrong. I take no further interest in it."

" You talk as though you'd committed some crime."

" I have."

" When are you going away ? "

" As soon as I can arrange certain matters or rather as soon as my lawyer can. I'm at a loose end till then."

" We're going to Folkestone on Wednesday. Why don't you come down there ? "

I look at her closely. She means it.

" I will. I can't tell you how kind—— " I can't express myself. I see Mrs Vendramin escorted by Bertola, moving towards the piano. He leaves her there and sits down on the other side of Myrtle Vendramin and pulls out a fresh cigar. Mrs Vendramin's supple fingers run up and down the piano. We are silent. The piece is familiar to me but I don't know what it is. She has a peculiar soft touch, she must be an unusual pianist. Mr Vendramin has moved to the other side of the sofa. I catch his eyes resting on his daughter and note her answering smile. Bertola's hands are clasped over his middle, his eyes closed. A soft breath from the girl's half-closed lips faintly fans my cheek.

In the large glass-covered verandah Mr Vendramin constructs himself a fortification. Seated in a wicker arm-chair, he calls to himself a page boy, or two if possible, and bids them bring him smaller chairs. One for his feet, another for his *Times* and his spectacles, a third for his overcoat, stick, gloves and so on. One more is placed at a strategic point, reserved in case of need for the faithful middle-aged maid who attends closely on his wants. He has a great objection to the propinquity of other hotel guests with whom, under no circumstances, does he hold any converse. Mrs Vendramin does not frequent the public rooms through which she passes only when going out for a promenade on the front or for a drive, accompanied either by the same elderly attendant or

by her understudy. Mr Vendramin prefers his meals in the hotel dining-room where the fowls specially imported by him are better served than in the sitting-room. His manner towards me is exceedingly courteous and urbane but I feel he keeps his eye on me. Myrtle does not extend her independent sorties beyond a seat on the green within view of the hotel. All this is new to me, but any surprise or amusement I might have felt disappeared with my discovery that she fully accepts her father's early Victorian prohibitions. It fits in to the picture. Mr Vendramin is early Victorian in appearance, manner and habit of mind. So is Mrs Vendramin, though twenty years younger than her husband. She too is treated by him as one who must be very carefully protected from the vulgar and profane, guarded against possible and unexpected danger. My fear was that I might have small if any opportunity of talking to Myrtle. From the little I had seen, I felt certain she was her father's ewe-lamb and I was conscious of the invidiousness of my position. I had come here to see her by her suggestion, it is true, but how far would her parents fall in with the arrangement? I soon perceived that in so far as she exercises her will, it is paramount. But she exercises it almost unconsciously and only to the minimum extent necessary to whatever her purpose may be. Mr Vendramin accepts the imposition of her will consciously. He has complete confidence in her—up to one particular point. That point he reserves. No woman is safe with a man unless he's her father or her husband. The Vendramins seem to carry their atmosphere about with them, to disengage themselves from their surroundings. They become at once notable. This marking off from the general, the commonplace, struck me from the first moment that I found myself sitting next to Myrtle, introduced to her by Ada at the Opera. In her manner and bearing, there was an individuality which stamped itself upon my mind or if it wasn't my mind, upon some faculty I can't identify, as at once unusual and familiar. It is only now that I am beginning to know Mr Vendramin that I can explain this mingled impression. It suddenly occurred to me this evening when he walked out of the dining-room that there was in his air of

dignity, aloofness and pride a likeness to mother and my next thought was that in some way I am reminded by the Vendramins of both my parents, especially as I remember them long ago. I remember that as a boy I was always conscious, at times ignobly because ashamedly conscious, of a difference in my parents from other people. I wanted them to be like other people just as I wanted myself to be like other boys and it was a recurrent pain to me to realise that neither they nor I, ever could be. And now, recognising the same exceptionalness in the Vendramins, I feel a strange comfort and ease in the company of this girl, who is almost a stranger to me, that I have never known in all the years of my manhood. I must have felt this instinctively when, hardly knowing her, I spoke as I did that Sunday at Sussex Square. I can't imagine "giving myself away" like that to anyone else I have ever known. In all my intimacies which have been mostly with women, there was an inevitable barrier, generally sensed immediately, and even if, on a rare occasion, I encountered an unusual sympathy as in the case of Mary Mackintyre, ultimately that barrier had to be reached. I think this explains why I know, that if I were a free man, there would be no barrier between Myrtle Vendramin and me. I don't know what magic she casts over me that makes me feel and think otherwise than is my habit, the habit to which my life has constrained me. But now I think I can explain why in that old-fashioned house at Sussex Square, I felt an at-homeness I have not known since the days of Craythorne. I hated my life enough before, God knows, but I have never hated it so much as now. Until now there was nowhere to view it from.

I have not attempted to say anything like this to Myrtle. It seems to me that if it is at all as I see it, she must feel it too. And if she does feel it, somehow or other I shall know it. That won't change anything so far as I am concerned, things have gone too far for that. But if I had one friend in the world who really understood, who could see under and beyond what I seem to be, who could see the real me face to face if only for a few short days, even hours, I think it would be a thing so precious to me that I would live for it. Perhaps if I

had that one precious thing to keep alive in my heart, I could very slowly and gradually change myself.

"When I was a little boy, we were at Brighton or somewhere, and from where I lay in bed I could see the sea. I always remember my delight when I woke up in the morning and saw those little dimples full of gold. Do you see what I mean? The glistening part that little fishing-boat is just sailing into."

"Does it make you happier now? Does beauty of scene make you happier?"

"I once thought beauty compensated for everything. I found on the contrary it made life unbearable. I've got a house on Lake Como. I shall never go back to it."

I can hear the water lapping against the walls of Aquafonti. I can hear the bells on the fisherman's nets jangling under the clouds as they sweep across the face of the moon. I can see Virginia standing in her dinghy calling back good-night as she heads for the Villa Peraldi. The lake shall mock at me no more.

"What will your wife say to that?"

"She can live there if she likes. The place is at her disposal, made as she wanted it made."

"Are you looking forward to your travels?"

"I look forward to nothing."

"You don't look well. You need a rest and change."

"I never rest. There can be no change. I've got to pay the price."

"You talk as though you were going to prison."

"There are punishments worse than men can inflict."

"It's what you are that matters not what you do——" She turns in her chair, bringing herself nearer to me. "I don't think you know what you are?"

"I do. That's why I loathe myself."

Mr Vendramin is being wheeled slowly across the grass towards us. It suddenly strikes me that this old man has taken me on trust without even knowing who I am and where I come from. With other people I have often enjoyed the part of an adventurer, surmising what they believed me to be and playing up to it. Now I dislike the notion immensely.

I get up to meet Mr Vendramin, lift my hat, make some remark. His dark eyes look me up and down pleasantly, then rest on my face.

" I hope you slept well. The sea-air is apt to be over-stimulating after London."

Myrtle has risen at his approach and bends over to kiss her father good morning. He has come to tell her they are going in to lunch and asks me to join them.

Mrs Vendramin alludes to mother as soon as I take my seat beside her. " She was so lovely. We met your parents at Mr Anderson's, Lord Burcott he is now. That was long ago but I shall never forget her."

The *naïveté* of her appreciation gratifies me. Thus mother should be spoken of. Mrs Vendramin seems to have the heart of a child. There is distinction in her simplicity and naturalness. Her passion for music peeps out constantly in her conversation. I am conscious of an experience new to me. The Vendramins are unconcerned with the world I know, it has no existence for them. It comforts me that they know who I am. Apparently until mother's death they used to meet her and father at the houses of common friends. Afterwards, as I have found in other cases, the acquaintance lapsed. Mother was a social figure, the centre round which all sorts of relationships were grouped. When she died, they faded away. The Vendramins could have no point of contact with the life father lived afterwards. The Kurt interests were remote from the enclave within which the dignified figure of Mr Vendramin was slowly ageing, within which the flower of Myrtle's youth was opening to life and light.

She's there on the platform. Her face, her sympathetic unforgettable face will be the last I shall see. That's a maid with her. She sees me and is sending her away.

" Thank you for coming."

Tame, tame. I can't find words and there are only ten minutes, a quarter of an hour. We walk to the quay. I touch her arm to keep her from the crowd. She might be going to travel in that dress. She might be going as far as Paris with me. What wouldn't I give for her to be going as

far as Paris ! We pass the crowded gang-planks. Only ten minutes, only ten minutes. And I can find nothing to say, except " May I write ? " She puts her hand in her coat pocket, gives me a piece of paper. " Enclose your letter in an envelope addressed to my maid. It's written there." No making a favour of it. She had anticipated and didn't mind showing it. Why hadn't I known her sooner ?

" I've met you only to say good-bye. But I'm very grateful, more than I can say. If—if—— "

" If what, Kurt ? "

Low deep voice but definite, unshirking.

" If you want me to come back, I will come back."

" Weren't you coming back ? "

" I didn't know. I must stay away six months to try whether I can break a chain that has bound me for twenty years."

" You aren't sure you want your freedom ? "

" Not for its own sake. If it were any use to anyone—— "

" It can't be of use to anyone if you don't value it."

I repeat the words to myself without grasping their meaning. I want to remember them. I shall think them over afterwards.

A long piercing whistle.

" Good-bye, Kurt."

" May I kiss your hand ? "

I hold her hand to my lips a moment. She turns and I stand watching her as she walks away from me down the empty quay. I want to memorise all I can of her. I shall remember her walk. It is like herself, unlike anyone else. Firmness and strength in it. And yet—I see the maid waiting in the distance, I am glad Myrtle is well taken care of. From the steamer they beckon me to cross the gang-plank. Another screaming whistle. My heart is lead within me as I step on board.

England again after six months. A long six months? Yes, by the measure of one separation, of one parting, by the separation from one sympathy, by the parting from one hope —dared I then have called it hope? The letter in my pocket breathes, very softly breathes, hope. "I will do anything I can to help you." Her voice, a note pianissimo but sustained, reached me just in time. "Anything I can——" Can she do anything? What am I going to ask her to do? She is doing something for me now, she is giving me hope. How? The memory of her deep thoughtful eyes gives it to me, the memory of her sympathy that did not need words, the memory of her cool wisdom, the memory of her firm walk, of her self-possession, of her understanding. I trust myself for the last time. I will stake all that is left of my belief in myself, a very small stake but all I have, on being right this time. If she can help me, I will hold to that help. I have carried through nothing, neither good nor evil, I will carry through whatever she can give me, however little she can give me. I believe in her, in no one and in nothing else. Why? Because my belief and my hope are one. My hope is my life. Therefore my belief and my hope and my life are one. She is my hope and my belief. Therefore she is my life. Why is this? Ask God. What is God? I don't know. What is Life? I don't know. What are hope and belief then? I don't know. It is not necessary to know. It is necessary to hope.

The other measure—Elinor. Half a year since I left her and I suppose I shall be with her, no, I shall be under the same roof with her to-night. Why do I come back to her? I'm not coming back to her. I'm coming back for another reason. Shall I remain with her? If I had self-respect I should say, No. A man who is not free cannot respect himself. A man who is not free is a slave. She needs protection—my protection. She would laugh the word to scorn, slave-masters scorn their slaves. But does she still command?

Can one travel for six months, go to Vienna, Buda-Pesth, Constantinople, Athens, Egypt, and get nothing from it all? What have I profited then? Three letters from Myrtle Vendramin, nothing else. What did they add to me? That

she still cares for the contact with me. Can I tell Myrtle Vendramin that I deserve her friendship? Can I tell her I love her? No. I must learn how to love. Can I ask her to teach me? Which comes first, love or freedom? Will love open the door to freedom or freedom to love? My freedom can't be of any use to anyone if I don't value it. Those were her words. Is my freedom worth anything to me? Not unless she shows me what to do with it.

I will give Elinor this last chance. I will deliberately stake my hope which is Myrtle Vendramin against her chance. Why do I give Elinor this chance? How has she deserved it? What has she ever given me? And what of myself have I given her? Love? Never. Myrtle Vendramin is the only woman I have ever known who is worth loving, the only woman worthy of my love—worthy of the love of a man who despises himself. Yet I know that no woman I have ever known has been worth my loving and Myrtle Vendramin is. I don't understand why this should be. On the top of it I'm going to give Elinor another chance, another chance of ruining what's left of my life. I'm going to number whatever-it-is Albemarle Street now, when I arrive, I'm going to be amicable, polite, even reasonably affectionate. I'm going to keep myself waiting as long as may be necessary before I see Myrtle Vendramin. I'm preparing to resume married life with Elinor. And that's a lie to myself. I am not so prepared. I would rather be dead than live with Elinor. Yet I would rather have been dead lots of times than live the life I've lived. And I went on living. But it's different since Myrtle Vendramin's letter. I'm going to be a match for Elinor this time. I'm going to give her a chance but it won't be a chance because she won't be prepared. I'm going to take a mean advantage. She's lived without me for six months after twenty years of marriage with me. I'm banking on her liking her freedom better, whatever its disadvantages, than living with me because—if—because—— Charing Cross.

"First floor. Thanks. This is the sitting-room, I suppose. My room—ground-floor, is it?"

Spacious room, shrouded lights, silver bowlful of flowers,

hot-house atmosphere, French scent, Elinoresque arrangement. Heavy curtain over arched doorway. She's beyond, I suppose. Time just on eight. Dressing? Very like Elinor to leave no message. She must have heard me but gives no sign. Shall I knock on door? No. Better wait. Sit down in arm-chair. "Beyond Good and Evil." "Appearance and Reality." Dear me! Elinor has become intellectual. Ah!——

Curtain pulled aside by young, good-looking maid. Enter Elinor, admirably dressed in black, irridescent bead trimming. Stands in doorway, advances towards me with dignity as I get up and approach. We meet under chandelier. We kiss. We sit down opposite each other, either side fireplace.

"Very sorry—engagement. Your telegram—short notice—didn't order dinner—thought you'd prefer club to being alone——."

"Quite all right, my dear girl, suits me excellently. Delighted you didn't change your arrangements."

"Only Amezaga and another man—a first night—nothing exciting."

She looks exceedingly well—little more made-up perhaps—difficult to tell in this light.

"We're coming back to supper here."

"I'll look in to say how d'you do if not too tired. Otherwise see you to-morrow."

"Hope your room will do. All I could get. Of course, I know nothing about your arrangements. Doubtless you will inform me later."

"No plans yet. Talk it over to-morrow."

Man announces car.

"You must excuse my running off. I must be punctual, it's a first night."

New manner excellent. Cold but polite. Friendly tone may indicate axe to grind. Accompany her downstairs. Engagement. Why not? Why break it for me? Quite right. But it changes things a bit, clears the situation a little, just a little. Now. Could I see Myrtle Vendramin? It's just possible. No harm in trying.

Club. Ring up Sussex Square. "Can I speak to Miss Vendramin?" "I am Myrtle Vendramin." "Kurt. Just arrived. Would it—can I—possibly come this evening—after dinner?" "Kurt? Yes. Oh, yes." "Thank you, thank you. It's very—I won't say any more now." "Good-bye, Kurt."

What luck! What tremendous luck! My God, what luck! I shall see her first. I'll tell her everything. I'll—I'll—I don't care what I do if only she—she——Porter is watching me from his box. Did I say anything out loud? Must go and dine. Room nearly empty, thank God. Cold manner will stifle Higgins. Good thing I'm not popular. Table further corner. Shall I drink champagne? No. I want to be calm—calm and cool, normal. What's my norm? Claret. Waiter. Pint of '22. What luck her being at home! Will she be alone? What shall I say? How shall I begin? I can't tell till I see her. It all depends on her. I can say I don't know what to do, don't know what line to take about Elinor. Yes. What am I to do about Elinor? What do I mean? I don't know. Yes, I do. I want to be quit of her, quit of everything that has been my life. What then? Hm—then I should be free. Should I? Free for what? Free to—— Of course I can't say till I see Myrtle. It's obvious that it depends on her. Wonder what her father will think of my turning up again? And her mother? She doesn't seem concerned about what they'll think. She said "Yes" as though she were expecting me to ring up just then—after six months, as though it were the most natural thing. Is it a natural thing from her point of view that I should want to see her the moment I arrive, that I should expect her to see me after dinner the evening I arrive? I've only been once in their house, then there was Folkestone, and three letters during six months, nothing in mine, stupid, depressed letters. Something in hers though—the last one. "I will do anything I can to help you." I've got it here all right, in my pocket. I'm holding on to it, Myrtle, and I'm going to hold you to it. I need your help. I need your help so badly that I can't even think without it. I shan't talk about the last six months, six years, sixty years. What do they matter?

To-day matters, this evening, only this evening matters. I'm hungry. Food in this place excellent, change from that filthy restaurant cooking. Decent St Julien too. Here's Spofforth sitting down at next table. Spofforth goes out of his way to show how much he likes me, does that to rile the others. Must be civil to him, can't let him down before them. "How are you, Spofforth?" "Yes, been away some months." "Egypt." "Oh rather, delightful." "No not as far as Assouan." "Luxor." "Yes, came away when it got crowded." "Yes." "Just so." "I know." "Exactly." "Ha. Ha." "You don't mean it." "Quite." "I'll take my coffee upstairs, waiter." "Haven't looked at an English paper, you know, for days. Good night Spofforth." Where had I got to? I seemed to have got into a line of clear thinking when that semi-imbecile interrupted me. Probably I hadn't. Let me see. Where was I? Nine o'clock. I can go in ten minutes. They would finish dinner about now. Coffee five minutes, wash my hands another five, taxi—all takes time. Ten minutes' drive. Mr Vendramin. Wonder if Mrs Vendramin will play. Myrtle will manage so that I can talk to her somehow. But what am I going to say? Oh, of course—decided I couldn't tell till I see her. Elinor, Amezaga and another man—— Who's the other man? What does it matter? It might matter. He might be the man. By Jove, so he might. Some new chap I don't know. She looked very striking. Always had plenty of admirers. Hulloa. Seven past nine. Run downstairs. "Porter. Call a taxi."

Same friendly butler, looks pleased to see me. "Hope Mr and Mrs Vendramin are well?"

"Very well thank you, Sir. Mrs Vendramin has gone to a concert and Mr Vendramin is resting. Miss Myrtle is expecting you in the drawing-room, Sir."

Myrtle alone. Luck again. Bless this butler, dear man. She comes to meet me at the door. She is in evening dress, colour Elinor calls pastel-pink. How brilliant her colouring is. She's beautiful. She looks full at me as I take her hand and guides me to the sofa facing the piano, the sofa

on which her father sat gazing at her that Sunday. By what magic does my nervousness fall away from me in her presence? I arrived confused, struggling to find words and now words seem to have little importance. It does not matter that I should explain myself, that I should try to discover means to express my tangled thoughts. Only what I feel counts and my feeling has in some fashion made itself so much one with me that I no longer need an outlet for it other than the simple words she puts into my mouth when she asks me a few plain questions about my journey, about my health and other ordinary things. Sense of urgency has vanished. Constraint does not exist. We are two familiar friends talking together. We know each other intimately, we're perfectly at home together. Separation has been vanquished, the link is re-established. I feel ground forming itself under my feet. With no conscious effort I feel that I have made known to her nearly all that is worth telling of my six months' absence and I have learned, it seems to me, though she says very little, what her chief concerns have meanwhile been. She has been very anxious about one of her sisters whom I do not know, one who lives in Paris and whose name is Sylvia. She has been back and forth there many times and must soon go again. She must in some way have drawn me into her so that I am unconscious of my surroundings and of time, for only when she exclaims "That must be mamma coming back from her concert" am I reminded of my own presence there and the reason for it. Now I realise that I have been living in the clouds. I must come back to earth and face reality. In a moment her mother will be here and then another moment and I must go out into the cold again. I must see her again and soon, soon, I must return to her warmth.

"May I see you often? May I be your friend?" I take her hand in both of mine. I do not try to control myself, to hide my longing for her.

She gently but firmly withdraws her hand, but reassuringly presses mine as she does so.

"I cannot see you so long as you go on living with your wife."

" Do you mean that I can't even be your friend, can't even come and talk to you ? "

" I do."

I hear sounds beyond the door.

" May I see you once more ? "

" As a free man, yes. Not otherwise."

Mrs Vendramin comes into the room followed by Mr Vendramin.

" Fancy your not going to the theatre, Myrtle darling. What did Beryl say ? A first night too."

I had bowed to her and am holding out my hand to Mr Vendramin as she speaks. He takes my hand and wishes me welcome back to England with a smile full of goodwill, goes forward and bends down to Myrtle who kisses him gently on the cheek. Then he turns to his wife.

" Myrtle gave up the theatre because she wished to see Mr Kurt, Leah. She can go to the theatre another time."

A timely question by Myrtle prompts Mrs Vendramin's immediate transition to the concert where her friend Cadajos had been playing. I accept the absorption of the precious moments left to me by the almost dithyrambic expression of her enthusiasm. I drift along smoothly in the stream of her artistic fervour, listening to her description of the performance with slow understanding but with a strange ungrudgingness. The Vendramin atmosphere is one that evidently suits my nervous organism for it is only when Mr Vendramin gets up and after stooping for his daughter's good-night kiss, holds out his hand to me with a courteous and kindly gesture that I become again aware of myself and realise that it is time to go. Myrtle is still sitting beside me and as I make my bow to her mother, Mr Vendramin from the doorway says to his daughter " Take Mr Kurt to the library, darling, while Evans calls him a cab," and as he smilingly pursues his way upstairs, she throws a kiss to him.

We go downstairs together.

" Leaving you is like going back to prison. With you life, freedom. Away from you, hopelessness. I don't know what

I'm going to do. I can't give you up. I haven't strength left to go on without you."

She is standing close to me by the fireplace in which a remnant of coal is glowing. She touches my arm gently.

" I want to help you and I shall help you."

" But you have made a condition which is very hard. I know you are right, whatever happens. But how am I to leave this woman I've lived with for twenty years at an hour's notice ? "

" I don't tell you to do that."

" No. But you won't see me until I do. And I can't do without you. I must see you. I was a boy when I married her. It's a lifetime I've spent with her."

" Haven't you just been separated from her for six months ? Did that cause you suffering ? "

" No. That didn't. Other things did ? "

" What things ? "

" Everything. My whole wasted life."

" Wasted with her. Did she suffer at being parted from you ? "

" Not as you mean. But she's helpless without me, you don't know her, helpless."

" How has she been managing without you for the last six months ? "

" She knew I was coming back. If I separate from her now, it will be final. She will be alone—quite alone."

Myrtle turns away, puts her hand on the mantelpiece and looks into the fire.

" You must decide," she says, without turning.

" May I see you once more before I take a final decision ? "

She faces towards me and looks firmly into my eyes.

" Yes. Once more. To-morrow at five. Good-night Kurt."

I lift her hand to my lips. " I know you think me a feeble creature. I am. I know that and I know something more —I know only you can save me."

She doesn't answer. She accompanies me into the hall. I look back at her standing under the lamp, her deep earnest

eyes follow me into the night. Stars shining on a world wrapped in darkness.

She had been going to the theatre but gave it up when I telephoned. Never alluded to it. Same first night as Elinor was going to, I expect. To Elinor, of course, engagement of more importance than seeing me. See me to-morrow. First nights don't keep. Besides, Amezaga and the other man. She'd have to put them off. Perhaps the other man important. Hope so. Anyhow I shan't see him. He's upstairs and I'm in bed. What a farce it is. But then, the farce isn't new, it's been going on for twenty years. Never been anything else but a farce. Just as much of a farce for her. Why should she want to keep it up? How do I know she does? If only she would say frankly she's had enough of it. Why should I have to be the one? Wouldn't she say so if there were somebody else? Perhaps there is no one else. That's just it. She'd be alone. I should have taken the best years of her life and left her to the mercy of the world. That's what she'd feel—to the mercy of the world. Her world's all right if one's got money. Perhaps she'd say, yes, a lot of money. Or perhaps she'd say "Money! What use is money to me now! You've robbed me of my youth. You've robbed me of my right to love and happiness." Wonder if she really does think that. It doesn't sound right, somehow. I haven't wanted to rob her of anything. I've wanted to take care of her. I've always given her all I could. Couldn't give her what I hadn't got. Love. How could I love her? What was there to love? And now I've lost the power to love if I ever had it. Frittered it away during all these years. Whom might I have loved? I loved mother once. Elinor killed that. She has nearly killed my affection for my sisters, they are her enemies. Everyone who belonged to me has always been her enemy. Why? No use thinking of all that now. I don't believe one can go on for ever like that, without caring for anything or anybody. One must care for something if it's only a dog. She does love Peter and poor old Waggles. She cried over leaving them in Italy. I never knew her to cry over anything else except when she got in a

rage. Perhaps the dogs saved her soul. Dogs can't save mine. I've got to care for someone. It's a necessity. And I do care. Thank God I've found one at last worth caring for. And I want to care more and more. I shall see her again to-morrow. I'm going to tell her again how much I care. But I must see Elinor first. Something's got to be done. What the devil am I to do? Leave her? Simply pack up and go away? And then? What good would that be? Myrtle has never said she wanted me, except as a friend. I've never thought of her in any other way. I'm not in love with her, am I? I wonder if I am in love with her. I wish I knew what being in love is like. I'm not infatuated. Not in the least. I suppose I was infatuated with Virginia. I let myself go then. I can't let myself go in that way about Myrtle. I don't want to. I didn't think about Virginia. No thought in the matter. A sort of blind urge and then disgust with myself. Disgust at being held by a fool of a girl like that, by the desire for her body. All right, in its way, wanting a particular body but not to be ridden and tortured by it. Nothing could be less like my feeling for Myrtle. I feel about Myrtle that she stands apart, above everybody and everything I have ever known, quite by herself. She's a special, unique human being, whose sympathy is priceless to me, whom I want to know more and more, whom I can't live without. I feel that if only I could be with her, everything would change. I should change. Perhaps I should learn from her how to love. How can any man love a woman when he loathes himself? He can fornicate with a woman and go on loathing himself, it helps the process along. I loathe myself because I'm everything I don't want to be. I'm a despondent, spineless, useless rag of a man. At all events that's what I have been for years. I've known it, been resigned to it, at least resigned enough not to think it worth while fighting. And now all at once I'm not resigned to it. A change has come, it's only just beginning but I'm conscious of it. Since Sussex Square, the second time I met Myrtle Vendramin. It was growing all the time I was away. It is growing now. What it means I don't know. Is that being in love?

First floor sitting-room. Albemarle Street. Mid-day.

Elinor reclining on sofa in mauve-coloured crêpe-de-chine négligée. Hairdresser leaving room as I entered it. I go to sofa, kiss her on forehead, sit down in arm-chair opposite her.

" Don't you think it looks rather odd, when I have friends who know you've been away for six months, for you not to come in and see your wife a moment before going to bed ? "

I'm anxious to be conciliatory.

" I'm very sorry. I was dreadfully tired. You weren't back when I got in."

Elinor's expression conveys a desire to let the matter pass.

We sit looking at each other. I must say something.

" Have you been all right all this time ? Have you been —happy ? "

" Happy. Can a woman be happy in my position ? "

The tone, the inflection sound familiar—to my satisfaction I don't feel touched.

" Could you be happy in some other one ? Is there anything I can do ? "

" I don't know. I don't expect happiness. I gave that up—— " She looks past me—into the distance, " many years ago."

" I wish you'd tell me whether there's anything I can do. Truly, my dear girl, I want to do anything I can. Can you suggest anything ? "

" What can I suggest ? "

" We've been separated for six months. Have you been, I won't say, happier—have you been less unhappy without me ? Please say what you really feel."

" I can't say I've been more unhappy."

" I'm glad you say that because—because I think the best thing I can do is to go away again—the sooner the better perhaps."

She now rouses herself. Her languid demeanour changes.

" If that's your intention, let me tell you at once that you will have to make different arrangements. I don't intend to knock about from pillar to post like this and if you're not going back to Aquafonti, I certainly shan't." She swings her

feet down and sits up facing me. The declaration and the tone in which it is made stimulate me. They imply that she doesn't mean to be a victim. I want her to stand up for her rights. I want her to be aggressive. I want her to be anything except pathetic.

" I'm glad to know your views. I quite understand your not wanting to go back there. I shall certainly never go to the lake again."

" After the way in which you left it, I didn't suppose you would."

She pauses, evidently expecting a rejoinder but I don't reply.

The will to amiability returns. " That's in the past. What I want to know is whether you intend to keep up the pretence of living with me, nominally I mean, of course. As you've announced your intention of going away again it is evident that you don't contemplate burdening yourself with my society."

The old Elinor reappears. All the better.

" It isn't a matter of burdening myself with your society. I think it is in the interests of us both to live and let live."

" You to go your way, I to go mine, you mean ? "

The tone is matter of fact. There is no note of plaintiveness.

I grow bolder. " Well, yes. That's about it."

" In other words, to separate ? "

She looks straight at me as though she were trying to read in my eyes whether I'm prepared to go as far as that.

I summon my courage. " Don't you think it will be best ? "

Her lips close firmly in a straight line. " While we're about it, hadn't we better settle the matter finally ? " It's the face of one who has made up her mind and demands assent to her decision.

" Do you mean divorce ? " I am shocked at my own boldness in uttering the formidable word.

" I haven't sought to get rid of you. I take it to be your wish and I accept it."

I can't believe my ears. It isn't credible. She actually

—— I look at her in stunned amazement. Divorce! By her wish! She consents. She actually wants it. It's amazing. I must keep control over myself. What am I to say next?

I don't have to say anything. She continues—

"There must be no slur on me."

"Slur on you, my dear girl. Of course not. You must come out of it stainless. The onus must fall on me. You must be spared in every way. I'll do anything in my power to make things easy for you."

"Remember, Richard, I've got nothing."

For the first time there is pathos in her voice. Naturally, poor girl. She's got to depend on me. She's alone. Everything is on my side.

"Elinor, I beg you not to worry about that. I'll divide my income with you. My one wish is to protect you. You must have a good lawyer to secure you in whatever way he thinks best."

She sits back on the sofa and appears to be thinking. I await her next words with tense anxiety, squeezing my fingers together.

"I shall have to live somewhere. A half share of your income won't be the same as though we were living together on the whole of it. I must have a house, there's the furniture to think of, hundreds of things."

Of course, poor girl, of course.

"My dear Elinor. You shall have Aquafonti and all its contents. I don't want anything. I'll sell the place and give you the money. Don't let that worry you. It's not a matter of money between us."

Elinor rises from the sofa and stands a moment, looking at me. Is she taking her last farewell of me?

"We part friends, Richard." She holds out her hand which I bend down to kiss, then lets it drop gently to her side.

We neither of us speak.

She walks slowly to the entrance of her bedroom, pulls aside the curtain and passes beyond.